

**Celebrities as Political Representatives:
Explaining the Exchangeability of Celebrity
Capital in the Political Field**

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Declaration

I, Ellen Watts, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

The ability of celebrities to become influential political actors is evident (Marsh et al., 2010; Street 2004; 2012, West and Orman, 2003; Wheeler, 2013); the process enabling this is not. While Driessens' (2013) concept of celebrity capital provides a starting point, it remains unclear how celebrity capital is exchanged for political capital. Returning to Street's (2004) argument that celebrities claim to speak for others provides an opportunity to address this. In this thesis I argue successful exchange is contingent on acceptance of such claims, and contribute an original model for understanding this process. I explore the implicit interconnections between Saward's (2010) theory of representative claims, and Bourdieu's (1991) work on political capital and the political field. On this basis, I argue celebrity capital has greater explanatory power in political contexts when fused with Saward's theory of representative claims.

Three qualitative case studies provide demonstrations of this process at work. Contributing to work on how celebrities are evaluated within political and cultural hierarchies (Inthorn and Street, 2011; Marshall, 2014; Mendick et al., 2018; Ribke, 2015; Skeggs and Wood, 2011), I ask which key factors influence this process. I conclude celebrity capital and social media, class, institutional connections, and consistency aid acceptance of celebrity representative claims. I consider the role of multiple media, situating claims within the political information cycles they provoke (Chadwick, 2017). I find social media are valuable tools for performing claims and provide a rhetorical shortcut for constructing constituencies, but do not enable celebrities to bypass 'reading back' (Saward 2010). This thesis also contributes to debate over the democratic implications of celebrity politics, by asking what political benefits result from this process. I argue celebrity representative claims offer additional opportunities for citizen engagement and valued sources of representation, but often capitalise on distrust in elected representatives to provide the same.

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1. Introduction

Have you heard the one about the two celebrity millionaires hoping to revolutionise our economic and political system?

The Telegraph (Hawksley, 2015a)

If an activist and a physicist have an argument about representative democracy in an East London cinema, when does this become news? On April 21st 2015, during a general election campaign dominated by argument over whether politicians were avoiding ‘tough questions’ and ‘ordinary people’, an activist took audience questions. He had just presented his new documentary film on economic and social inequality. Now in cinemas across the UK, we watched live as the activist took questions about what could be done to produce a ‘radically different society’ (StudiocanalUK, 2015).

A Doctor of Astrophysics took the microphone to audience cheers, telling the activist he was a ‘big fan’. The activist was not a fan of his questions. Their key point of disagreement lay in the degree to which citizens could achieve political change through their representatives in parliament, and therefore the significance of an election temporally close yet seemingly distant from the activist’s mind. The physicist asked the activist whether he would support his own strategy to ‘change the system radically from within’. His campaign Common Decency (2017) seeks to convince citizens ‘voting gives you a voice’, and if they vote based on ‘decency’ rather than party affiliation parliamentary representatives will be more responsive to them. ‘If you really don’t want us to vote’, the physicist asked, ‘what do you want us to do?’ (Steerpike, 2015b).

The activist rejected the proposition that the ‘ballot box’ could bring ‘real change’, arguing ‘I don’t agree with remaining within the parameters that have been set for us’. He also objected to the physicist’s persistent demand he should tell the audience what ‘we’ should do, countering that while he had ‘some ideas’ ‘I also have really serious limitations’. The activist suggested instead that his role was simply to ‘amplify the issues

for the people in this room', bringing the issues set out in his documentary to public attention.

Neither of these men are politicians or journalists and yet this exchange about how citizens can create political change *did* attract attention, being reported online by over 50 news sources including national newspapers. While comedian Russell Brand and Queen guitarist Brian May may therefore be divided to some degree over politics, what unites them is their ability to use their celebrity status – what Driessens (2013) terms 'celebrity capital' or recognisability – to intervene in the political field. It is their celebrity capital, their ability to accumulate media representations, which enables them to attract attention to their political opinions. What is also clear from this exchange however is that these are not simply opinions, they are political *claims*: claims to 'represent or know what represents the interests' of citizens and to be in a position to help them achieve this (Saward, 2010: 38). In doing so Brand and May follow countless other celebrities in making claims to political capital, the power afforded by *recognition* in the political field (Bourdieu, 1991).

Political credibility, however, cannot simply be achieved by attracting attention. Response to *The Emperor's New Clothes*, the aforementioned documentary directed by Michael Winterbottom and fronted by Brand, demonstrates the tension around attempts to use celebrity capital for political purposes. In a broadly positive review for *The Telegraph* Rupert Hawksley (2015b) lamented that Brand 'finds it impossible to separate the comedian from the activist', combining criticism of modern capitalism with 'cracking jokes'. 'If he can't take his own revolution seriously', Hawksley asks, 'how does he expect us to?' And yet without the comedian there would be no activist, at least no activist in possession of such valuable media resources to 'amplify the issues' (StudiocanalUK, 2015). Brand encouraged viewers of his YouTube series *The Trews* to promote the film, claiming 'it's hard to get it in cinemas' because it's not 'Avengers 2'

(Russell Brand, 2015a). Had Brand not appeared at one time in Hollywood films himself however, it is unrealistic to imagine I could have watched his anti-capitalist documentary at a chain cinema in Staines.

Of all the political doors Brand's celebrity capital has opened, perhaps the most surprising was the one to his own kitchen. Here, just six days after rejecting Brian May's offer of teaming up to affect change at the ballot box, Brand welcomed then Labour leader Ed Miliband for an interview. Brand told *Trews* viewers that, in spite of his reservations, 'what's important is that this bloke will be in parliament, and I think this bloke will listen to us' (Russell Brand, 2015d).

Brand's political credibility was contested, with Conservative Party leader David Cameron dismissing him as 'a joke' (The Guardian, 2015). Defence of Brand in response was based on the large social media audience to whom he afforded Miliband access, and for whom he was assumed to speak. Indeed Miliband justified granting Brand a spot on his campaign schedule by arguing this was a necessary effort to reach citizens outside the 'empty stadium' of the mainstream campaign (BBC News, 2015a). In Chapter 5 I argue the interview itself was a negotiation over representation, with Brand challenging Miliband over whose interests he would serve before vouching to viewers that a Labour government would 'listen to us' (Russell Brand, 2015d). Brand's own right to be listened to in the political field was contingent on acceptance that citizens, in turn, listened to him. In this thesis, I argue that the claims celebrities make to represent citizens are central to how they intervene and are evaluated in the political field.

1.1 Argument and Contribution

Why are some celebrities 'deemed credible and legitimate' political actors while others are not (Wheeler, 2013: 3)? Who is empowered to exercise these judgements, and what factors frequently inform them? While much attention has been paid to celebrity

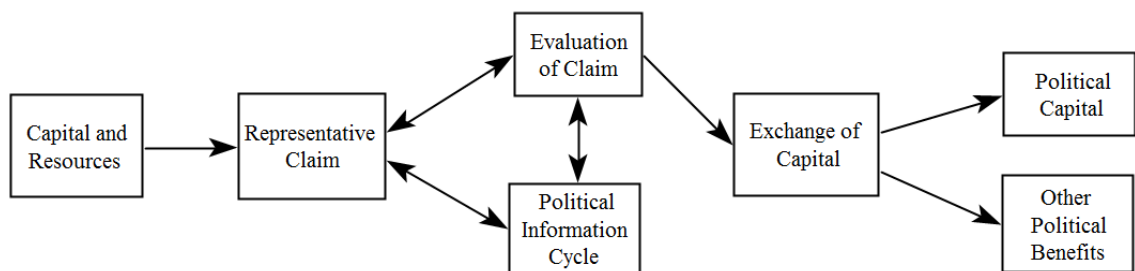
interventions and their consequences, as I discuss in Chapter 2, the process underpinning movement from the field of entertainment into the political field remains unclear. To understand how celebrities work across multiple domains Driessens (2013) proposes conceptualising celebrity as a form of capital, accumulated through media representations and exchangeable for other resources. While this provides a valuable starting point, the example of Russell Brand illustrates that high recognisability does not automatically afford political recognition. A need therefore remains to examine *how* celebrities can ‘convert’ this capital into ‘political power’, and why some are able to achieve this where others are not (Driessens, 2013: 549).

The key contribution of this thesis is an original theoretical model for explaining how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital. To identify the ‘missing link’ in this process I return to Street’s (2004) question of whether celebrities can represent ‘the views and values of others’, and how this ‘claim to representative legitimacy’ is made. I argue that the political value of celebrity capital, and therefore its exchangeability, is contingent on celebrities’ claims to represent others. In doing so I build on Driessens’ concept of celebrity capital, by demonstrating it has greater explanatory power in political contexts when combined with Saward’s theory of representative claims. This considers representation not as a ‘static fact of electoral politics’, but as something that is performed through claims to ‘represent or know what represents the interests of someone or something’ (Saward, 2010: 38). Anyone can construct such a claim; to understand the exchangeability of celebrity capital, we must ask when claims performed by celebrities are more likely to be accepted.

How are these concepts connected? How does considering celebrities as prospective political representatives help to explain the exchangeability of celebrity capital? In Chapter 3 I situate celebrity capital in the theories which inform it, drawing on Bourdieu’s work to illustrate the centrality of representation to the norms and practices

of the political field. I argue Bourdieu's (1991) conceptualisation of political capital as trust granted by a group is readily reconcilable with Saward's (2010) argument, that representative claims receive democratic legitimacy when accepted by appropriate constituencies. Claims to represent others in the political field are therefore the key mechanism underpinning the ability of celebrities to receive recognition within it. The model I contribute for explaining this process can be seen in Figure 1.1 below, and is set out in detail in section 3.7. This furthers our understanding of how celebrities claim and obtain the 'power of mobilisation' afforded by recognition as a legitimate political actor (Bourdieu, 1991: 190)

Figure 1.1. Explaining how Celebrity Capital is Exchanged for Political Capital



This contribution is necessary because while conceptualising celebrity as a form of capital explains why it is exchangeable, the amount of celebrity capital alone cannot explain its exchangeability for political capital specifically. I therefore also contribute evidence on the key factors which influence this process, building on prior work which uses celebrity capital as an analytical tool in political contexts (Arthurs and Little, 2016; Arthurs and Shaw, 2016; Ribke, 2015). I find that scale *is* a key factor due to the inherent interconnection between celebrity capital and representative claims, as high capital supports claims to 'reach a wide group' (Saward, 2010: 148). This is reinforced where a celebrity also possesses large social media audiences, as 'metrics of social media success' provide more tangible connection to 'representations of the people' (Marwick, 2015: 343; Marshall, 2014: 219). While the process of exchange is influenced by 'stigma associated

with celebrity in politics' (Brubaker, 2011: 29), building on literature on how celebrities are evaluated I find this does not hinder everyone equally (Inthorn and Street, 2011; Mendick et al., 2018). This is explained by three additional key factors: the celebrity's *class* background, their *connection* to formal politics, and their *consistency* of self-presentation across fields and platforms.

Why does it matter how celebrities intervene in the political field? As I discuss in Chapter 2 existing literature makes a case for why celebrities matter, from suggesting they provide additional opportunities for citizen engagement (Drake and Higgins, 2006; Wheeler, 2013) to demonstrating the conflicting consequences of their efforts to change public policy (Bell and Hollows, 2011; Morgan and Sonnino, 2008). In placing renewed emphasis on celebrities as political representatives this thesis provides further justification for taking celebrities seriously. With the exchangeability of celebrity capital contingent on claims to represent others, celebrity interventions in the political field *always* implicate citizens. Figure 1.1 above acknowledges this, showing claims possess not only the capacity to facilitate exchange of capital but to afford political benefits for citizens. Celebrities' claims are also often constructed in connection or opposition to politicians. My case studies therefore contribute further empirical evidence over the democratic implications of celebrity politics. I find celebrities' representative claims *can* afford opportunities for engagement and help citizens to be heard by other actors, however they sometimes capitalise on citizens' sense that their elected representatives are not listening.

By studying not only how celebrities intervene in the political field but how they are evaluated, I also find a consequence not considered in other literature. Celebrities do not simply have the capacity to afford political benefits for citizens by achieving campaign aims; there is also an inherent benefit to feeling that your interests or values are represented by someone with high celebrity capital. Building on Street's (2004)

suggestion that celebrities *could* represent the political views of others, I therefore argue not only that this *does* happen but that it can be politically valuable for those who consider themselves to be represented.

1.2 Questions and Cases

This thesis addresses three overarching questions. First and foremost, it aims to address *how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital*. As equal celebrity capital will not necessarily be equally exchangeable, I also ask *what key factors influence this process*. Finally - acknowledging that the representative claims underpinning this process have implications for citizens and politicians - I ask *what other political benefits result from this process*.

My model for explaining how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital, and the role of representative claims, emerged inductively from the three qualitative case studies presented in Chapters 4-7. These provide illustrations of the process of claim-making and exchange at work – or in its failure to work – in practice. Chapter 4 assesses Russell Brand’s efforts to ‘amplify’ a grassroots housing campaign, Chapter 5 analyses celebrity endorsements of the Labour Party during the 2015 general election, and Chapters 6 and 7 consider actor Emma Watson’s efforts to engage citizens with feminist issues through an online book group.

Why did I choose these cases? While I did not approach case selection with a set of strict criteria, as ‘we do not always know what to notice’ (Kozinets, 2015: 190), I chose cases with comparison in mind. To develop theory on the exchangeability of celebrity capital and consider the factors which influence this process, I aimed to observe celebrities with varied personal and professional backgrounds intervening in different political contexts. In the discussions of methods and data presented in case study chapters, I describe my use of Google Alerts to collect online news coverage on the relevant

celebrities. This was not simply a method of data collection, but part of a broader routine of monitoring which informed case selection. Between 2014 and 2016 I set up Google Alerts for 24 celebrities and topics - from Joey Essex to Angelina Jolie – and routinely checked social media accounts associated with these celebrities. I used Evernote to catalogue examples of celebrities’ political campaigns or comments, for example keeping a daily diary of observations during the 2015 UK general election campaign. Collecting content on celebrity interventions *as they were happening* enabled me to situate them in the political information cycles they sparked (Chadwick, 2017). Studying a small number of cases affords their description in rich detail (Halperin and Heath, 2012), an approach I argue is well-suited to assessing how claims were constructed, remediated, and evaluated.

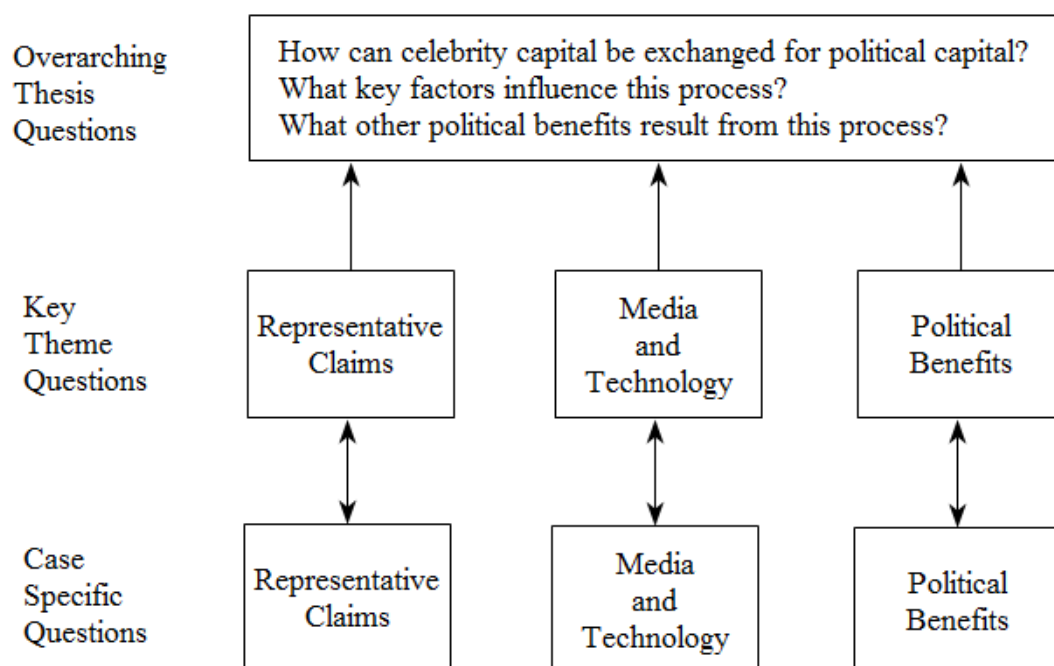
This approach acknowledged the unpredictability of celebrity political interventions, something demonstrated repeatedly by Russell Brand. As I began my research Brand continued to attract regular news media attention almost a year after his appearance on BBC *Newsnight* (2013), where he argued with Jeremy Paxman about the utility of voting. Observing Brand’s social media accounts I decided to follow my curiosity to Hoxton, and a protest he was promoting to save residents of the New Era estate from eviction. I subsequently sought to contrast this grassroots housing campaign with celebrity interventions in a more formal political context. Russell Brand’s late intervention in the Labour Party campaign reinforced my perception that the 2015 general election provided ideal opportunity for such comparison. I also opted to study Labour’s three celebrity-fronted party election broadcasts, as they provided further opportunity to consider the role of different media and compare between celebrities.

Having observed Emma Watson’s political activities since her speech at the UN in 2014, I chose the online feminist book group she established in January 2016 as my final case for three key reasons. Watson can be compared with other celebrities due to her higher celebrity capital, and different (middle) class background. The ‘everyday’ setting

of her online book group provided an interesting contrast with other cases, and also afforded opportunity (through interviews with members) to address questions these had raised about celebrity claims from citizens' perspectives.

As I discuss in the closing section of this thesis, this approach enables comparison but also brings challenges. Each of my case studies use different methods and data to explore the making and evaluation of celebrity claims. Each contributes however to addressing the same overarching questions, with three key themes spanning these contrasting cases: representative claims, media and technology, and political benefits. These themes shape the specific questions each case study addresses. Figure 1.2 below provides an illustration of how these elements of the thesis work together.

Figure 1.2. The Relationship between Questions and Cases



Each case addresses the question of how celebrities construct *representative claims*, and how these are evaluated by constituencies and audiences (terms I discuss in section 3.6). For example in Chapter 4 I show how Russell Brand constructed claims to represent residents of the New Era estate, and a broader constituency of citizens against

austerity. In Chapter 6 I show that members of Emma Watson's feminist book group accept her claims, and consider the key factors affording her comfortable acceptance beyond members who identify as her fans.

Celebrity claims are almost always made through media; we cannot assess how they are constructed or evaluated without considering the roles of *media and technology*. In Chapter 5 for example celebrity endorsements of the Labour Party were uploaded to YouTube, shared on party social media accounts, *and* shown on television. I consider how celebrities used different platforms to perform claims, and how these resources supported their construction and evaluation. For example Emma Watson's ability to use social media to attract broader attention supports her acceptance, as it demonstrates her high celebrity capital. However even celebrities with large social media audiences cannot control how claims are remediated or received. I therefore consider the role of political information cycles (Chadwick, 2017) - which include but are not limited to media coverage - in how claims are evaluated.

Finally each case considers not only whether representative claims were accepted, facilitating exchange of celebrity capital for political capital, but what other *political benefits* resulted from this process. In Chapter 6 for example I consider the implications of Emma Watson's claims for those who accept them, while in Chapter 7 I examine the broader political benefits resulting from engagement with Watson's online feminist book group. I do not neglect negative outcomes, arguing for example in Chapter 5 that there is limited evidence either politicians or citizens benefitted from celebrity endorsements.

1.3 Plan of the Thesis

In **Chapter 2** I present my argument, that to understand how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital we must return to considering celebrities as prospective political representatives. Reviewing core literature on celebrity politics, which

categorises celebrity politicians and debates their democratic implications, I argue Street's (2004) suggestion celebrities can claim to represent others warrants further attention. Introducing Driessens' (2013) concept of celebrity capital, I consider the limited research using this as a tool to explain celebrity interventions in the political field (Arthurs and Little, 2016; Ribke, 2015). I argue that while conceptualising celebrity as a form of capital provides a valuable starting point, it remains unclear how this is exchanged for political capital. I therefore consider what other research tells us about how citizens evaluate celebrities, and what it implies about the role of representation. I begin with focus group work, which demonstrates that celebrities are contrasted positively with politicians yet evaluated according to 'established conventions' and classed cultural hierarchies (Inthorn and Street, 2011; Loader et al., 2016; Manning et al., 2016; Mendick et al., 2018). Reviewing a broad range of literature which seeks to explain celebrity influence, I argue my alternative approach enables us to consider celebrity interventions in context and consider key questions about the role of media.

In **Chapter 3** I present my key contribution: a model for explaining how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital through representative claims. I consider representation as a key point of connection between entertainment and politics (Marshall, 2014), arguing that Driessens' (2013) concept of celebrity capital has greater explanatory power when combined with Saward's (2010) theory of representative claims. I contextualise celebrity capital within Bourdieu's theories of fields and capital and note its key limitation: scale alone cannot account for its varied exchangeability. I draw on Bourdieu's (1984; 1987; 1993) work on habitus, class trajectory and cultural hierarchies to consider factors which may explain this variation, while using Bourdieu's (1991) work on the political field to demonstrate the centrality of representation to its norms and practices. Before considering how celebrity representative claims might be constructed and evaluated, I illustrate implicit interconnections between Saward and Bourdieu to

argue acceptance of representative claims affords political capital. Building on these theories I present an original model for explaining the exchangeability of celebrity capital for political capital, considering each stage of this process in turn.

Chapter 4 presents the first of three case studies, comedian Russell Brand's involvement in a grassroots housing campaign to save the New Era estate. Brand used markers of class to demonstrate 'descriptive similarity' to residents (Saward, 2010: 100), but positioned himself as their 'amplifier' to negotiate his limited ability as a wealthy celebrity to 'mirror' constituents. 'Amplification' meant using social media to mobilise citizen support, and seeking to attract positive media coverage. Through fieldwork and thick description of media content by and about Brand, I reconstruct the political information cycle around the campaign's largest protest (Chadwick, 2017). In spite of his media resources Brand was unable to 'amplify' New Era, as the political information cycle became dominated by debate over his right to represent residents. This worked to Brand's advantage in unexpected ways. As his claims were contested on the grounds of 'hypocritical' wealth by tabloids residents came to Brand's defence, and support on social media provided a proxy for 'public' acceptance. Brand was therefore able to exchange celebrity capital for political capital, with this case demonstrating how representative claims facilitate this process. Examining the outcome of the campaign I argue Brand's intervention brought clear benefits for residents, but his use of populist rhetoric diminished the role played by their elected representatives.

Chapter 5 examines celebrity endorsements of the Labour Party in 2015 by Martin Freeman, Jo Brand, Steve Coogan, and Russell Brand. I argue celebrities positioned themselves among citizens, and constructed distance from politicians, through 'performances of authenticity'. Asking whether celebrity capital and social media enabled Labour to 'bypass' negative media coverage, I present a content analysis of individual responses to endorsements on Twitter. While the support of 'popular' celebrities was

perceived to possess strategic benefits, claims were undermined as evaluations proved inseparable from political information cycles. While wealth remained a source of contestation, in this more formal context backlash over behaviour and concerns over comedians' credibility demonstrate the endurance of class-based norms privileging 'seriousness' (Inthorn and Street, 2011). The greatest 'reading back' was reserved for Russell Brand's political 'U-turn', supporting the argument that authenticity is evaluated through perceived consistency (Marwick, 2013; Thomas, 2014). Though celebrity claims were undermined by negative media coverage, I find failure to spark a political information cycle presents the greatest barrier to political capital. With the political value of celebrity capital predicated on claims to represent others, a celebrity must demonstrate their ability to attract attention to justify their place among political elites.

Chapter 6 is the first of two chapters presenting an online ethnography of Emma Watson's online feminist book group Our Shared Shelf, set up as a 'next step' for the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador. Analysing Watson's posts on the forum and self-presentation through social media, I argue she uses her personal and professional resources to perform three types of claim to represent members. Watson uses social media to manage her distance from members *and* from formal politics, but unlike other celebrities does not construct claims in opposition to politicians. Interviews with Our Shared Shelf members show Watson's claims are also evaluated differently, as members distanced themselves from celebrity in general but *not* Watson specifically. High celebrity capital supports her acceptance, as members - ranging from undying fan to uninterested reader - perceive her as 'giving voice' to issues of personal importance. This case also shows there are political benefits to the sense that someone with high celebrity capital represents your political interests or personal experiences. However Watson's acceptance is also afforded by her middle-class background, consistent self-presentation, and connection to political (but not partisan) institutions. Acceptance of Watson through

comparison to ‘other celebrities’ therefore demonstrates the factors I argue lend strongest support to exchanging celebrity capital for political capital.

In **Chapter 7** I examine the political benefits of engagement with Emma Watson’s online feminist book group. Having argued in Chapter 6 there are political benefits for those who feel Watson represents their interests, I show how for fans in particular her political interventions have provided a ‘gateway’ into feminism. The benefits of engagement with Our Shared Shelf are not however limited to the minority of members interviewed who identify as fans. Members reported learning, primarily about feminist issues in countries other than their own or affecting marginalised groups they do not belong to. Members also reported talking about feminism more frequently, and feeling greater confidence in political discussions. This chapter demonstrates how the political benefits resulting from celebrity representative claims are shaped by the media and technology used. The discussion forum setting affords particular benefits for those unable to discuss feminism on other online platforms or in other everyday contexts. Through fieldwork around the feminist Women’s March protests in January 2017, I argue the group provides additional opportunities to connect and participate with others not afforded by Watson’s high profile UN activism alone. Additionally discussions on the forum - and Watson’s own mediation of the protest through social media - provided an additional point of connection to a global movement.

In the closing chapter (**Chapter 8**) I contrast my case studies to consider the exchangeability of celebrity capital, and the broader implications of celebrity claims to representative status. I present my model for explaining the exchangeability of celebrity capital for political capital through representative claims, demonstrating how this played out in each of the three cases. Comparing the barriers celebrities faced to political recognition, I argue four key factors influence this process: celebrity capital and social media, class, consistency of self-presentation, and connection (to political but non-

partisan institutions). I then address my third overarching question, considering how citizens benefitted from celebrities' claims to represent their concerns but these played in some cases on cynicism toward politicians. Having outlined the key contributions of this thesis, I discuss how each case contributes to varying strands of academic literature. I conclude by discussing the limitations of this research, and by raising questions for further research on the relationship between celebrity, representation, and the political field.

2. Celebrity, Capital, Representation: A Literature Review

I want to suggest that it is at least conceivable that unelected persons may legitimately represent politically the views and values of others

John Street (2004: 447)

The movement of actors between the fields of entertainment and politics has largely received attention from those seeking to categorise these actors, debate their democratic value, or assess their influence. This research demonstrates that some celebrity interventions in the political field receive greater acceptance from citizens than others. It also shows celebrity involvement can have tangible benefits for campaigns and citizens, while oversimplifying important issues and obfuscating the relationship between politicians and publics. This research does not examine the process underpinning the movement of celebrities between the fields of entertainment and politics. It *is* clear, however, that these findings and the variation between them cannot be explained simply by how famous a celebrity is.

In spite of this, I argue that Driessens' (2013) concept of celebrity capital – recognisability accumulated through media representations - provides a stronger starting point for considering how celebrities move between fields. Work using this concept as an analytical tool has contributed to our understanding of what factors - such as genre and class - influence the value of celebrity capital in the political field (Arthurs and Little, 2016; Arthurs and Shaw, 2016; Ribke, 2015). As I argue in Chapter 3 however, conceptualising celebrity as a form of capital explains why celebrities are *able* to move between fields but does not resolve *how* this process works in practice.

In this chapter I examine what these strands of academic research tell us about how celebrities are evaluated in the political field, and how the ability of celebrities to work across the fields of entertainment and politics might therefore vary. I argue that while the typology proposed by Street (2004) has been used by others, his suggestion that

celebrities are not simply political actors but political *representatives* has rarely been explicitly addressed. I therefore consider references to representation across the research on celebrity and politics, arguing that a return to the question of how celebrities claim to represent others is key to understanding how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital.

2.1 Defining (and Defending) ‘Celebrity Politics’

While the relationship between celebrity and politics has been the subject of longer-standing discussion, West and Orman’s 2003 book *Celebrity Politics* instigated a focus on defining ‘celebrity politicians’ and debating their democratic value. I begin by giving an overview of the typologies scholars propose for categorising those who work across the fields of entertainment and politics. While this work has provided a valuable starting point for considering the relationship between celebrity and politics, it raises important questions about *how* this movement occurs and the role of *representation* that remain largely unaddressed.

Movement has always been implicitly central to literature on celebrity politics. West and Orman (2003: 117) conclude the US has a ‘celebrity political system’ generated as celebrities ‘from the entertainment world cross over into the political system, and when celebrities from the world of politics cross over into the world of entertainment’. Assessing the actions of ‘celebrity activists’ in the US since the 1940s, they provide a typology of ‘celebrity politicians’ with five categories (West and Orman, 2003: 2-4). This includes ‘political newsworthies’ (politicians ‘skilled at public relations’), ‘legacies’ from ‘prominent political families’, ‘famed nonpoliticos’ (celebrities who run for public office or act as ‘issue spokespersons’), and ‘event celebrities’ who gain ‘overnight’ notoriety. While they judge these to have differing democratic implications, they conclude celebrity politics ‘risks the short-circuiting of representative democracy’ and ‘endangers the ability of ordinary Americans to hold leaders accountable’ (West and Orman, 2003: 113). West

and Orman's (2003: 4) assertion celebrities simply 'piggyback fame in one sector onto political life' gives no indication of *how* this movement occurs, and underestimates the barriers to exchanging celebrity capital for political capital.

Street proposed a more succinct typology (2004; 2011; 2012), differentiating between 'CP1s' and 'CP2's. 'CP1s' are politicians or candidates 'whose background is in entertainment, show business or sport' or who use 'the forms and associations of the celebrity to enhance their image and communicate their message', while 'CP2s' are entertainers who 'pronounce on politics' and 'claim the right to represent people and causes' without seeking elected office (Street, 2011: 245). Street (2004: 443) challenged West and Orman's assumption celebrity is inherently at odds with 'proper political representation', arguing that 'representation has to be understood as both a political process and a cultural performance'. Indeed Street (2004: 449) suggests that 'in certain contexts and under particular conditions, performers can lay claim to represent those who admire them'. This thesis aims to investigate this suggestion empirically, but also to argue that the claims celebrities make to represent others underpin the process of movement between entertainment and politics. While Street's typology cannot explain this movement, he hints at its contingent nature by noting that performers associated with different genres appear to claim different political relationships with their fans. This raises the question of when celebrity representative claims are more likely to be accepted, and what factors therefore influence the exchangeability of celebrity capital.

Reviewing literature on celebrity politics Marsh et al. (2010) argue Street's typology is restrictive, suggesting five categories divided into two 'spheres of origin': celebrity or politician. 'High-visibility figures' can be 'celebrity advocates' who aim to influence policy agendas, 'celebrity activist/endorsers' who support candidates or parties, or 'celebrity politicians' seeking office (Marsh et al., 2010: 327). They argue that evidence over whether such actors 'undermine' or 'enhance' democracy is often

‘superficial and anecdotal’ (Marsh et al., 2010: 332-4). While not intending to address this gap, this review also neglects the question of how or when agents are able to move between the ‘spheres of origin’ around which their typology is constructed.

While van Zoonen’s focus is on politicians her typology is interesting as it focuses not on the *roles* celebrity politicians can fill, but on the *personas* they are able to perform. van Zoonen (2005: 83-4) describes a political ‘outsider-insider’ spectrum which intersects a celebrity ‘ordinary-special’ spectrum. The ‘ultimate celebrity politician’ is able to balance these ‘contradictory requirements’, presenting themselves as experienced outsiders who combine ordinariness and exceptionality. This fits Street’s (2004) argument that representation is a cultural performance, but raises the question of how unelected actors perform claims to representative status and manage ‘contradictions’ between celebrity and politics. Rather than sharing West and Orman’s (2003) concerns for the health of democracy van Zoonen (2005: 82) argues - based on comparison between pop culture fans and highly engaged citizens - that celebrity politics broadens exposure to political information while providing further opportunities for the most engaged. I discuss empirical evidence over the political benefits of celebrity politics in section 2.5, with my case studies lending further consideration to the implications of celebrity interventions for politicians and citizens.

2.1.1 Debating the Democratic Impact of Celebrity Politicians

Literature on celebrity politics has therefore not only aimed to define and differentiate between relevant actors, but to debate their democratic value. Of the typologies discussed Street’s has proven most enduring, but subsequent literature adopting it has not made theoretical advances over how celebrities move between fields. While the question of the role of representation in this process has also largely been neglected, Drake and Higgins’ (2006) frame analysis of speeches by Bono and Arnold Schwarzenegger provides a valuable exception. This supports Street’s (2004) argument that the elected and unelected

make different claims to represent others, but also demonstrates that celebrities more broadly draw on differing resources to do so. Drake and Higgins (2006: 99-100) argue we need to consider not only ‘the *particular* celebrity’ and their ‘earlier image’, but also the ‘political claims they make’ and their ‘mode of performance’. Their argument Bono expends great ‘rhetorical effort’ to justify his right to speak in spite of ‘his celebrity credentials’ suggests celebrity status is something with ‘negative and positive associations’ which must be negotiated in political contexts (Drake and Higgins, 2006: 94). By drawing on Saward (2010) I argue celebrities negotiate these tensions by constructing representative claims. Considering political and cultural hierarchies in Chapter 3 however, it is clear not all celebrities will need to expend equal effort to do so.

Contributing to broader debate over democratic value, Drake and Higgins (2006: 100) argue celebrity politics should not be ‘dismissed as a mere symptom of the trivialization of politics’ as it provides a ‘means of contemporary political engagement’. Wheeler reaches similar though perhaps more muted conclusions in *Celebrity Politics*, which applies Street’s typology to a far broader range of past and present examples in the US and UK. Wheeler (2013: 170-1) concludes that ‘the celebritization of politics has brought about alternative forms of political engagement’, though neither he nor Drake and Higgins demonstrate this empirically. He concludes celebrities’ ‘democratic worth’ varies, and to enable citizens to ‘achieve a real sense of connection with political causes’ they must ‘demonstrate ideological substance and provide clarity in establishing a fixed range of meanings’ (Wheeler, 2013: 170-1). Aside from implying that celebrities should therefore apply themselves to politics consistently and with consistency, Wheeler does not provide an explanation for why some are better placed to receive recognition than others. Similarly while Wheeler argues there has been a ‘growing willingness within the audience to accept celebrities as authentic political figures’ he provides no evidence as to how citizens evaluate celebrities in the political field.

Wheeler (2012: 421) has also situated celebrity politics within different theoretical contexts, concluding in the context of ‘late modernity’ that celebrities can have democratic value by enabling citizens ‘to participate in terms of their own efficacy’. Wheeler (2014) has also asked how celebrities use social media to associate with political campaigns and causes, taking conflict in Gaza as a case study. While his argument social media affords celebrities greater freedom to engage with contentious causes is logical, the need remains for broader examination of how celebrities’ media resources support their ability to intervene in the political field. Similarly while Wheeler (2014) suggests social media may enable greater connectivity between celebrities and fans, in the context of the cultural hierarchies I discuss in section 3.3 we need also consider how celebrities negotiate *distance* from citizens in this context. Interventions also need to be considered within a hybrid media system to better grasp how social media platforms do or do not afford celebrities control over their political statements (Chadwick, 2017).

Ultimately Panis (2015: 383) is correct to argue that terms such as ‘celebrity politics’ have been adopted ‘without much reflection’, constraining efforts to examine the ‘fluid’ boundaries ‘between different types of celebrities’ socio-political involvement’. The boundaries between fields themselves and celebrities’ ability to cross them are also not readily explored through these typologies. Though Davis (2010) focuses on ‘celebrity-like’ politicians, his contribution to debate over the consequences of celebrity politics is empirically driven and situates the phenomenon in a more productive theoretical context. Through interviews with politicians and journalists Davis (2010) develops the concept of ‘media capital’, to examine how politicians are able to gain political status through media representations. This idea that politicians accumulate ‘personalised’ media capital through ‘all sorts of performances or associations’ - within and outside the political field - raises the question of how other actors can use such resources to political advantage (Davis, 2010: 86). The utility of media capital to

politicians is not simply a matter of *how much* but *how it is accumulated*. Davis (2010: 95) argues a politician's status is often damaged by 'over-appearance in the media', or 'in media with little symbolic weight in the political field'. With celebrities often but not uniformly attracting stigma, as I discuss in section 2.3, this raises the question of how the different media associated with and used by celebrities influences their own political weight.

There is much truth in Street's (2012: 347) reflection that literature on celebrity politics 'offers more in the way of theory and speculation than hard evidence'. However subsequent theoretical development has been key to moving literature on the relationship between celebrity and politics away from cyclical discussion of typologies, toward a framework for understanding how this relationship works. Following from Davis' study of 'celebrity-like' politicians within Bourdieu's framework of fields and capital I now outline Driessens' conceptualisation of celebrity itself as a form of capital, and the valuable but limited attempts to use this as an analytical tool.

2.2 Conceptualising Celebrity as a Form of Capital

Driessens (2013) proposes conceptualising celebrity as a form of capital, providing an analytical tool that can be used to examine the 'convertibility or interchangeability of celebrity'. He defines celebrity capital as 'recognizability' - accumulated through media visibility as 'recurrent media representations' - which 'quickly fades' without 'renewal and repetition' (Driessens, 2013: 552). Celebrity capital can be converted into other forms of capital, including political capital, enabling agents to move within or between fields. The term 'celebrity capital' has been used in multiple ways. Gunter's 2014 book *Celebrity Capital*, for example, asks how celebrities can 'be valuable' across fields as a results of the capital they possess.¹ In conceptualising celebrity itself as a *form* of capital however

¹ For a review of other examples of how the term 'celebrity capital' has been defined or used see Driessens (2013).

Driessens (2013: 549) provides a tool for going beyond description, and asking how celebrities can ‘convert their fame into political power’.

I further discuss the concept of celebrity capital and its explanatory limitations in Chapter 3, as I set out the theoretical model that emerges from my case studies. It is important to briefly note however that while celebrity capital is a valuable conceptual tool, recognisability alone cannot explain ability to obtain political capital. Indeed Driessens (2013: 551-2) argues it is necessary to separate celebrity capital or ‘recognizability’ from symbolic capital or ‘recognition’, as clearly accumulation of the former does not guarantee achievement of the latter. Driessens (2013: 556) gives the example of an academic who accumulated celebrity capital through representations on news and entertainment media, but achieved mixed success exchanging this capital in different fields. This suggests it does not simply matter *how much* celebrity capital an agent possesses, but also *where* they are attempting to exchange it and *how* it was accumulated. Driessens (2013: 557) also acknowledges a need to examine ‘the different trajectories in accumulating celebrity capital’, which requires us to situate a celebrity’s present recognisability in context of their personal and professional background. While few efforts have been made to date to use celebrity capital as an analytical tool in political contexts, those who have done so place class and genre at the core of variation in its exchangeability.

2.2.1 Explaining the Varied Exchangeability of Celebrity Capital

Ribke’s (2015) *A Genre Approach to Celebrity Politics* uses field theory to examine celebrity attempts to obtain elected office. Through case studies that contribute called for evidence from outside the US and UK (Panis, 2015; Street, 2012), Ribke substantiates Street’s (2004) suggestion that the genre a celebrity is associated with has political implications. Ribke (2015) argues there are two key reasons genre shapes ability to gain ‘electoral and political power’: consistency and prestige. Celebrities associated with ‘a

non-ambiguously positive generic identity' have 'a better chance of making a successful foray into politics', with those who succeed promoting policies that 'parallel' their previous self-presentation (Ribke, 2015: 174). Celebrities are 'hierarchically structured according to the prestige' of genres they are associated with and their own socioeconomic backgrounds, influencing the relative positions they can hope to obtain in the political field (Ribke, 2015: 172-3). In Chapter 3 I further consider how celebrities are evaluated along classed lines (Mendick et al., 2018; Skeggs and Wood, 2011), considering the implications for how they construct claims to represent citizens. There is a performative element to this that, I argue, requires further attention. Ribke (2015: 146) argues Brazilian congress member Jean Wyllys presented himself as an 'outsider' during his time on reality show *Big Brother*, enabling him to distance himself from the low-status genre which afforded him recognisability and emphasise his academic credentials.

While West and Orman (2003) and Wheeler (2013) provide a broad overview of examples, Ribke's (2015) case study approach enables him not only to describe what a celebrity did but to consider the factors shaping their political actions and achievements. In keeping with this emphasis on context Ribke also considers celebrities' political interventions within their broader careers, and therefore the trajectory of *how* they accumulated celebrity capital. However while cases are explored through rich descriptive detail Ribke gives no indication of how he approached data collection or analysis. Similarly while his theoretical approach produces valuable insights into the importance of genre, there is a lack of conceptual clarity. We can assume through his aim to explain how fame acquired through 'media exposure' is 'converted into political or power' that his idea of celebrity capital matches that of Driessens (Ribke, 2015: 7). Ribke uses the terms celebrity capital and media capital without clearly defining them, and regularly refers to types of capital without explication of how Bourdieu's theories are being applied.

Ribke does however raise valuable questions over how celebrities can use their resources to intervene in the political field, and what constraints they may face. He concludes that neither media experience nor the ability to attract media attention guarantee political success. Like other political actors celebrities must ‘internalize the official code of conduct of the political arena’, and usually rely on the support of organisations such as parties and ‘mass media institutions’ (Ribke, 2015: 174). My case studies consider the interplay between different media resources, asking whether a mainstream platform is necessary for recognition and whether all media attention must be positive for celebrity capital to be exchangeable. Ribke’s case study of Israeli television host turned Minister of Finance Yair Lapid implies an important interconnection between representation, performance, and political status. He argues Lapid consistently presented himself as a ‘representative figure’ of ‘middle class’ Israel in spite of his wealth, but response to Lapid on social media suggests he lost this representative status once in government (Ribke, 2015: 42 -51). This raises the question of how representative claims are performed by celebrities who lack the formal or institutional claim to represent others that comes with an elected position in the political field.

In her work on Russell Brand – which uses Driessens’ (2013) concept of celebrity capital - Arthurs pays closer attention to how celebrities construct representative roles. Arthurs and Shaw (2016: 1148) argue to ‘translate’ his celebrity capital from comedy to politics, Brand constructed himself ‘as an effective anti-austerity spokesperson for the disenfranchised left’. Through textual analysis of his 2013 *Newsnight* interview with Jeremy Paxman, they show how Brand constructs himself as a voice ‘of the people’ while positioning Paxman ‘as an apologist for the establishment’ (Arthurs and Shaw, 2016: 1141). This provides a valuable return to the question of whether celebrities can claim to represent citizens’ political interests, and how this is attempted by ‘creatively constituting’

a constituency for such claims (Arthurs and Shaw, 2016; Street, 2004). Arthurs and Little (2016) build on Ribke (2015) by examining how resources accumulated in the field of entertainment assisted Brand's migration, further demonstrating that political interventions should be considered in context of personal and professional trajectories. They trace how Brand developed a consistent brand as he shifted between platforms and genres in the field of entertainment, and his comedy underwent a 'thematic shift towards politics'. This enables them to examine how Brand repurposed 'his celebrity and skills as a comedian and entertainer to seek influence in the political field' (Arthurs and Little, 2016: 54).

Recognising that celebrity capital is insufficient to explain movement between fields, Arthurs and Little (2016) combine this with assemblage theory to compare four cases where Brand attempted to affect political change. These include the New Era campaign which I examine in Chapter 4, and 'Milibrand' - Brand's interview with then Labour leader Ed Miliband - one of four celebrity endorsements I study in Chapter 5. I discuss Arthurs and Little's conclusions over these specific cases in these chapters. They use media content by and about Brand and interviews with activists to show that while his political interventions consistently received media attention, Brand did not achieve consistent political impact. They argue this variation is explained by the different 'reactive assemblages' created as Brand intervened in different political contexts (Arthurs and Little, 2016: 7). Brand exemplifies Driessens' (2013) argument that recognisability and recognition should not be conflated, as the 'privileged access to the media' which enabled Brand's political interventions was 'as much a liability in these contexts as a strength' (Arthurs and Little, 2016: 113). Arthurs and Little (2016: 96-111) argue Brand came to be seen as a 'legitimate representative of a politically significant portion of society', but could not 'transfer his audiences and celebrity apparatus' to electoral politics. This establishes a crucial aspect of Brand's political interventions which is yet to be fully

explored: how he constructed claims to represent citizens, and how these claims were evaluated.

I build on this by arguing for a broader return to the question of how celebrities claim to represent citizens, arguing that this is central to understanding how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital. In Chapter 3 I develop this argument by considering how Driessens' (2013) concept of celebrity capital and Saward's (2010) theory of representative claims can be combined, to demonstrate how acceptance as a political representative affords legitimacy in the field. Having discussed the limited existing work seeking to explain the exchangeability of celebrity capital I now turn to broader research assessing how celebrities are evaluated, which provides further indication of which factors may influence this process.

2.3 Evaluating the Political Value of Celebrities

Previous research reveals interesting normative assumptions over the general and comparative value of celebrities, the ideal relationship between celebrity and politics, and who should or should not be able to talk politics publically. Through focus groups and interviews with first time voters in the UK Inthorn and Street (2011: 481) found celebrities 'represent a welcome alternative to elected politicians whom they distrust'. While participants expressed desire for more humour in politics however being 'loud' or 'funny' was deemed 'unacceptable', with many describing 'formal politics as a sphere which is only accessible to those who comply with its established conventions' (Inthorn and Street, 2011: 482-3). The ideal political leader was described in terms which privilege age, a 'serious demeanour', 'financial' and particularly business 'success', and masculinity. This may not only limit the 'certain' celebrities Inthorn and Street conclude have 'the potential to connect citizens with a political cause' (2011: 481), but have broader implications for who is able to exchange celebrity capital in the political field. While celebrities will therefore be evaluated against political norms they must also

attempt to demonstrate that, unlike politicians, political work is not ‘part of their job’. Inthorn and Street (2011: 482) argue participants used ‘clues’ from celebrities’ personal lives to assess whether causes were ‘genuinely close to someone’s heart’, placing strong emphasis on perceived authenticity.

‘Conflicting requirements’ of political actors among young citizens were also found in survey and online discussion group research across the UK, US and Australia. Loader et al. (2016: 409) found participants wanting ‘representatives to be “serious” political actors, knowledgeable and competent in their field’ but also ‘for them to be “one of us”’. There is an interesting tension in that celebrities are evaluated positively in comparison to politicians, who are generally not trusted, yet not taken seriously as political representatives themselves. Loader et al. (2016: 413-14) found celebrities’ social media posts are seen as ‘more authentic’ as they are ‘free from the need to secure electoral support’ and therefore able to ‘say what they felt to be true’. However respondents’ discussion of celebrities was ‘critically cautious’, questioning their legitimacy as unaccountable political commentators and expressing concern that others (especially younger people) might be ‘gullible’ or ‘impressionable’ (Loader et al., 2016: 412-3).

Though Manning et al. (2016: 10) argue a general acceptance of celebrities using social media ‘to discuss social and political issues’ was not ‘straightforward acceptance of the integrity and authenticity of *all* celebrities’, they do not explore which personal or professional factors shape these distinctions. Economic capital is clearly a resource to be negotiated with care. While wealth is not viewed as an inherent barrier to authenticity, to be seen as ‘genuine’ celebrities must not be considered to be promoting political causes primarily to promote themselves (Manning et al., 2016: 10).

Which celebrities are seen as seeking self-promotion and which are not, is not simply based on how much media attention they actually receive. Mendick et al.’s (2018)

focus group research, which used celebrity to examine the relationship between meritocracy and aspiration among British teenagers, found class-based distinctions drawn between celebrities. Perceived motivations and cultural hierarchies are important and interconnected. Fame is only possessed ‘legitimately’ as a ‘byproduct’ of recognition in a field seen as ‘skilled’, while aspiring to fame in and of itself is immoral (Mendick et al., 2018: 140-156). Fame, generally viewed with distaste, is also ‘legitimated’ if the celebrity is seen as using this to ‘benefit others – through charitable giving, representing the nation or inspiring people’ (Mendick et al., 2018: 147). I discuss this and other work on the relationship between genre, class and gender in Chapter 3, considering the implications for celebrity capital in the political field. Mendick et al (2018) also argue that celebrities are aware of these distinctions, and reproduce them in their self-presentation. This raises the question of how celebrities negotiate their political interventions around these norms, and which celebrities are best placed to receive recognition in the field.

Evidence over how younger citizens talk about celebrities clearly suggests that not all claims by celebrities to represent others will be evaluated in the same way, and consequently that not all celebrity capital is equally exchangeable. It also reveals a discomfort around associating with celebrity in politics that is reinforced by the literature on endorsements I now discuss. While I argue this literature often strips celebrity politics of context, the repeated finding of ‘third person effects’ provides valuable insight into how celebrity capital might be attributed political value.

2.4 Celebrity Influence: Citizen Opinion and Candidate Evaluations

Literature aiming to explain the influence of celebrity endorsements usually takes an experimental survey approach (Jackson, 2007; Jackson and Darrow, 2005; Pease and Brewer, 2008; Veer et al., 2010), or uses surveys asking participants to report whether celebrities would influence them (Austin et al., 2008; Brubaker, 2011; O’Regan, 2014;

Pew Research Center, 2007; Wood and Herbst, 2007). These generally find little-to-no effect, though non-partisan efforts to mobilise young voters may increase self-efficacy (Austin et al., 2008), and endorsements may influence candidate evaluations among those with low political salience (Veer et al., 2010).

An exception comes from Garthwaite and Moore's (2013) study of Oprah Winfrey's endorsement of Barack Obama during the 2008 Democratic primaries, which compared regional sales of her magazine and book club selections as 'indicators of her popularity' with votes for Obama. They conclude Oprah's endorsement was 'responsible' for over a million votes, making her intervention decisive. Arguing her endorsement represents a likely 'upper bound' of potential effects, they credit her 'nearly unparalleled popularity' for the effectiveness of her endorsement (Garthwaite and Moore, 2013: 382). If celebrity is generally seen to be of low value as Mendick et al. (2018) suggest, why would high celebrity capital render someone a more effective endorser? I argue that the literature on celebrity endorsements points again to representation as the missing link. In a context where individuals often assume others are influenced by celebrities even if they are not, those with high celebrity capital are assumed to speak for others.

There are limitations to using experimental and survey approaches in this context which limit our understanding of how celebrity endorsements are made, remediated and evaluated. Such studies lack external validity, and their design makes assumptions about what does but more significantly what does *not* matter in how citizens evaluate endorsements. Veer et al. (2010) for example used a fabricated endorsement, using a pre-test to find the 'most appealing endorser' before exposing participants to a poster stating 'I vote Conservative, do you?' which featured either Kate Winslet or a non-celebrity. This contradicts the arguments presented in this literature review that the celebrity's mediated history and self-presentation matter. Other experiments take 'real' endorsements as cases, such as Pease and Brewer's (2008) study which exposed participants to an Associated

Press article about Obama with or without discussion of Winfrey's endorsement. The assumption remains however that responses are not shaped by media coverage or other campaign events, nor the content or performance of the endorsement itself. Nisbett and DeWalt (2016: 152-4) argue young people experience celebrities' political statements 'in snippets and blurs' as part of a 'glut of political chatter', as statements circulate through social and 'traditional' media. This informs my approach to examining celebrity representative claims within the political information cycles they spark (Chadwick, 2017), assessing how claims are made, re-made, and evaluated across platforms.

The difficulties associated with studying celebrity endorsements raise an interesting question about how celebrity is attributed political value. The limits of closed-question surveys can be seen in Wood and Herbst's (2007) observation that respondents frequently left 'unrequested' 'anecdotal comments' sharing their opinions, which they used to illustrate findings. One key issue is 'social desirability bias', with participants potentially 'unwilling to admit' they had been influenced by celebrities (Wood and Herbst, 2007: 154). This can be observed in the interesting discrepancy between studies of Oprah's endorsement. While Garthwaite and Moore's (2013) research using data on the sale of products associated with Oprah argues she was partly responsible for Obama's primary victory, survey research found participants most frequently felt her endorsement would influence others *but not themselves* (Pew Research Center, 2007). Pease and Brewer's (2008) experiment found that this perception has consequences. They found increased intention to vote for Obama *not* because participants evaluated him more positively as a result of Oprah's endorsement, but because they evaluated his *chances of winning* more positively and therefore considered him a more viable candidate.

In survey research on the perceived influence of endorsements Brubaker (2011: 18) attributes this to 'third person effects', where individuals feel 'the public' are more influenced by celebrities than they are themselves. Brubaker (2011: 29) suggests that

‘stigma associated with celebrities in politics’ leads people to ‘distance themselves’, seeing themselves as ‘above caring’ what celebrities think even when they support ‘their’ candidate. Brockington (2014: 131) questions the idea that those who claim not to be influenced by celebrities are demonstrating ‘disavowed interest’. This is part of a broader challenge to the assumption that celebrity has ‘very broad appeal’, agreeing instead with Couldry and Markham (2007) that celebrity is in fact a minority interest. While I discuss both of these sources further in section 2.5, it is worth briefly considering what this means for suggestions of ‘distancing’. The literature on celebrity endorsements and even more so the focus group research discussed in section 2.3 show there *is* a stigma around celebrity, and particularly around the idea of being politically influenced by celebrities. Citizens - regardless of personal interest - may still seek to distance themselves from celebrity culture and disparage others associated with it. Indeed Brockington’s (2014: 10) survey research also finds evidence of third person effects, with citizens and particularly ‘political elites’ believing celebrity advocacy to have widespread influence, concluding therefore that ‘the force of celebrity derives from the perception of its power’.

I argue this has two broad implications for studying celebrity and politics. Firstly it is necessary to keep ‘third person effects’ in mind in the design and interpretation of research, as studies asking participants to self-report whether they are ‘influenced’ by celebrities are likely to encounter this distancing. Secondly this distancing itself - combined with the assumption that others are interested in and influenced by celebrities - could have interesting implications for the process of movement between fields. O’Regan’s conclusion from survey research is confusing at first. In spite of arguing respondents generally perceive *others* – but not themselves – to be listening, she concludes ‘using celebrities to convey messages to the public is successful because people are more likely to listen to them than to others’ (O’Regan, 2014: 479). However Pease and Brewer’s (2008) findings over Oprah’s endorsement demonstrate *direct* effects on

citizen opinion are not the only kind worth considering, as third person effects can influence perceptions of candidate viability. In the case studies presented in this thesis, we see this perception that a celebrity is able to reach a wide audience and is listened to by others forming a key part of how their representative claims are evaluated. Though celebrity is generally seen to be of little political value, celebrity capital is *attributed* value where the celebrity is accepted as speaking on behalf of others.

While third person effects denote a tendency for citizens to distance themselves from the *general* idea of celebrity influence, citizens do not distance themselves from *specific* celebrities equally. Through an experiment with students in Canada, Jackson and Darrow (2005) found the four celebrities they used had differing levels of influence on opinion. They draw on McCracken's 'meaning transfer' theory to explain this. In the context of commercial endorsements McCracken (1989) argues evaluations depend on the 'meanings' the celebrity brings to the process, and the 'credibility' of the combination of celebrity and product. In line with Ribke's (2015) argument about the importance of consistency, both argue that endorsers who present multiple or ambiguous meanings are less effective than those who have been 'typecast' (Jackson and Darrow, 2005; McCracken, 1989).

This variation has been further explored through focus group research in the Czech Republic by Štechová and Hájek (2015: 348), who argue that *political* consistency is also key. The actions of 'coat-changers', and celebrities who simply endorsed 'a different side than the respondents expected', were not forgotten once the campaign was complete. Nisbett and DeWalt's (2016) focus group research with US students also found a desire for consistency, but also a broad cynicism over celebrities' motivations for intervening in politics. 'Fame' does not necessarily 'translate to the political arena', as participants differentiated between celebrities who seemed credible and relatable and those – such as 'trashy' 'hot mess' Paris Hilton – considered 'entertaining but not the

least bit credible’ (Nisbett and DeWalt, 2016: 149). As I discuss in Chapter 3 this supports arguments that perceptions of ‘authenticity’ are associated with consistency (Marwick, 2013; Thomas, 2014). It also further suggests that celebrities need not only act consistently, but also act consistently with expectations framed around political and cultural hierarchies.

The uneasy relationship which emerges from this literature between celebrities and formal political actors may have broader implications. This lies firstly in citizen perceptions. O’Regan (2014) finds celebrities are not considered to be more politically informed than the ‘average’ citizen, yet Štechová and Hájek (2015) demonstrate celebrities are also not considered to be ‘average’ by citizens. While citizens generally saw celebrities as not possessing ‘certain necessary competencies’ to comment on politics, Štechová and Hájek (2015: 342) found that in the distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ which characterise distrust of politicians celebrities were often positioned among ‘them’. This uneasy relationship can also be seen in the outcomes of celebrity interventions for ‘both sides’. As I further discuss in Chapter 5 endorsements present risks for both celebrities and candidates, leading Wood and Herbst (2007) to conclude celebrities may be ‘best served and more influential’ supporting non-partisan campaigns. This raises the question of how celebrities can perform representative claims in this context that will be accepted by citizens; in Chapter 5 we see them attempting to construct distance from politicians even as they endorse them. In the final section of this literature review I discuss celebrity interventions in less formal political contexts, where this tension between celebrity, elected actors and citizens presents itself in other forms.

2.5 Promoting Engagement, Promoting Themselves: Celebrity Issue Campaigning

Literature on celebrity non-partisan campaigning is also largely focused on influence but in broader terms, asking whether celebrities influence citizen engagement with political issues, media and policy agendas, and campaign outcomes. While addressing a variety of

questions through different methods, this literature demonstrates that celebrity interventions in the political field can result in clear political benefits for citizens yet these often co-exist with negative outcomes. This also raises interesting questions about the role different media resources play in celebrity-fronted campaigns, and the challenges faced in spite of their recognisability and media experience. Based on these existing findings I ask what role celebrities' media resources play in the process of claim-making and exchange, and what political benefits result (or do not result) from this process.

2.5.1 Influence on Issue Agendas and Citizen Engagement

Research on celebrities, citizens, and political agendas enables further consideration of Inthorn and Street's (2011: 481) conclusion 'certain' celebrities 'have the potential to connect citizens with a political cause'. Couldry and Markham (2007) combined survey research, media diaries and interviews to ask whether 'celebrity culture' more broadly 'offers connections' to public and political issues. They conclude there is little evidence for claims celebrity culture provides 'potential routes into political culture', with citizens more likely to 'draw boundaries' between them than 'make connections' (Couldry and Markham, 2007: 418). While celebrity was 'central' to some (generally young and female) diarists' media consumption, others felt a 'distance' from celebrity culture or were dismissive of those who 'care'. Survey results showed not only that celebrity is more minority interest than major concern, but also that those who follow celebrity most closely report the lowest political interest, engagement and efficacy (Couldry and Markham, 2007: 413). Through further survey research and focus groups, Brockington (2014) also finds celebrity 'does not occupy the attention and interest of the majority'. He argues celebrity advocacy is 'surprisingly ineffective at communicating with publics', and is infrequently behind citizens' 'commitments to good causes' (Brockington, 2014: 162). A 'widespread' belief *others* are influenced by celebrity advocacy however, particularly

among politicians and NGOs, confers on it a ‘power that it may not otherwise have’ (Brockington, 2014: 133).

Through survey research Panis and Van den Bulck (2012) contribute findings on when organisations are most likely to benefit from celebrity support, in terms of attracting citizen attention. They place strong emphasis on recognisability, arguing ‘the more famous the better’, but celebrity capital alone cannot negotiate citizens’ ‘sense of scepticism’ that celebrities are motivated by ‘enhancing their image and fame’ (Panis and Van den Bulck, 2012: 86-8). Consistency and consistent commitment are therefore valued, with respondents looking for the celebrity’s ‘personal connection’ to and long-term engagement with a ‘single organization’. However as I discuss in section 2.5, the tension between attracting attention and acceptance as authentic is further complicated by the finding that longer-term advocacy receives less interest than ‘one-off’ interventions (Panis and Van den Bulck, 2014: 35). I find this is a particular challenge to exchanging celebrity capital for political capital; celebrities must demonstrate an ability to attract attention for this capital to have political value, but *not* be perceived to seek attention for themselves.

Not only are some celebrities perceived as more authentic than others but citizens consider some issues to be more ‘appropriate’ for celebrity engagement, with Becker (2013) finding ‘appropriate’ issues are those seen as less politically important. Through an experimental survey Becker (2012; 2013) found exposure to ‘celebrity issue-advocacy messages’ increases ‘receptivity’ toward celebrity activism *and* engagement with the promoted issue, suggesting political benefits for all concerned. Becker (2012: 226-9) argues celebrities have greater influence where they have a high ‘favourability rating’ *and* the issue is uncontroversial, though her use of a single case (Angelina Jolie and the refugee crisis) means further comparative work is required.

The question of which issues celebrities tend to promote is interconnected with consideration of the outcomes – positive or negative – of their interventions. Celebrities are most associated with transnational activism on issues of lower salience or which are uncontroversial, such as environment and conservation, development, debt relief, fair trade, and human rights (Becker, 2013; Brockington, 2014; Partzsch, 2014; Wheeler, 2013). Celebrity involvement can not only make it more difficult for campaigns to ‘control the message’ (Becker, 2013: 3), but also skew the issue agenda more broadly. Celebrities have been accused of ‘diverting attention from worthy causes to those which are “sexy”’ (Wheeler, 2013: 159), leaving ‘unattractive’ issues without due consideration. Celebrities promote not only certain issues but also certain solutions at the expense of others, undermining governments’ ‘legitimacy and credibility to solve development issues’ and offering ‘simplistic responses to intractable conflicts’ (Partzsch, 2014: 9; Wheeler, 2013; 159).

That celebrity interventions in the political field are grounded in claims to represent others can be seen in other discussion of their discontents. Political organisations in the Global South have distanced themselves from Bono, rejecting his claims to represent their views or objectives (Partzsch, 2014). Partzsch’s (2014) argument that celebrities generally exercise ‘power over’ rather than ‘power with’ raises questions about how citizens respond to claims by celebrities – who possess resources they generally do not – to speak and act in their interests. Brockington (2014: 152) argues that that while politicians and NGOs believe celebrities ‘connect’ citizens to issues around international development, their general disinterest in practice means celebrity ‘simulates’ public engagement rather than ‘signifying’ it. Paradoxically it is the widespread belief in ‘celebrity power’ that makes celebrities a ‘powerful lobbying tool’ for organisations. Considering the broader implications, Brockington concludes that while celebrity is not

responsible for an ‘iniquitous economic system’ celebrity advocacy has done little to ameliorate it (2014: 162).

The resources celebrities possess certainly not only *support* their claims to represent others, but also *distance* them from those they claim to represent. Interventions in the political field can certainly be beneficial for celebrities, lending their careers a ‘vital shot in the arm’ (Wheeler, 2013: 156). The economic and celebrity capital they accumulate as a result may exacerbate the scepticism we have seen toward celebrities’ motives for political engagement. While Brockington (2014) dismisses ‘complaint and carping’ against celebrities on the grounds of their wealth, his conclusions in particular raise the question of who truly benefits from their claims to represent citizens. Turning from transnational activism to targeted campaigning we see further examples of this debate, and of the complex co-existence of beneficial and detrimental outcomes from celebrity interventions. Celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall for example have made ‘considerable economic profit’ from the books and other outputs associated with their political activism (Bell and Hollows, 2011). I finish by using research on their cases to consider these questions, but also to argue that the role of media and technology in such campaigns has been under investigated.

2.5.2 *Celebrity Single-Issue Campaigning*

Jamie Oliver’s campaigns around food, education, and health policy – grounded in claims to understand citizens’ best interests - have resulted in political change. These campaigns have been mediated in part through Oliver’s television platform on Channel 4. The ‘Feed Me Better’ campaign supported by *Jamie’s School Dinners* sought to improve the quality of food served in British schools, while *Jamie’s Ministry of Food* aimed to ‘get people healthy again’ through initiatives for citizens to ‘pass on’ culinary skills (Hollows and Jones, 2010). Morgan and Sonnino (2008: 106-9) credit the ‘power of celebrity’ for Oliver’s ability to secure local political support for ‘Feed Me Better’ ‘almost overnight’,

giving a voice to dinner ladies who had long been ignored and bypassing bureaucratic hurdles to achieve faster change. This also had a national impact. Following Oliver's delivery of petition signatures collected through the 'Feed Me Better' website to Downing Street, Tony Blair swiftly pledged an additional £280 million to improve school meals (BBC News, 2005). A 2010 study by the Royal Economic Society linked the changes to 'a marked improvement in national curriculum test results' (Garner, 2010).

These successes have also increased Oliver's symbolic capital, as he has been afforded recognition by political actors and citizens and received both television awards and a 'most inspiring political figure of the year' award from Channel 4 (BBC News, 2006). Examining Oliver's career trajectory through field theory Hollows and Jones (2010: 319-20) argue he uses this symbolic capital to move between fields, though must 'periodically draw on his original grounding' in the culinary field as the 'source of his passion and integrity'. While Oliver's representative claims are therefore supported in part by his background as a chef, there are questions both over *how* Oliver claims to speak for others and *what* these claims have actually achieved.

Naik's (2008) comparative analysis of government documents and newspaper coverage challenges Oliver's claim that it had 'unfortunately' taken a documentary to change government policy (BBC News, 2006), arguing most of Oliver's proposals had already been set out in a government white paper. Morgan and Sonnino (2008: 95) agree that Oliver's campaign focused on 'easy wins' rather than the expansion of free school meals, and point out that overall take-up of school meals in the UK actually declined. Celebrity claims that implicate politicians may therefore exacerbate perceptions that they are unwilling to address issues that matter to citizens. Hollows and Jones (2010) argue *Jamie's Ministry of Food* underplayed existing local and national initiatives and denigrated the government's ability to solve the 'food crisis', while relying on local councils to take on Oliver's initiative after the cameras left. Morgan and Sonnino's (2008)

concern that contestation from and lack of engagement with parents undermine school food reforms also raises questions about the impact on the citizens Oliver represented, or potentially *misrepresented*. Hollows and Jones (2010: 311-13) argue Oliver demonstrated a limited and potentially damaging understanding of residents' lives in *Jamie's Ministry of Food*, acting as a 'moral entrepreneur' who implied there was 'little worth rescuing from working-class culinary-culture'.

Bell and Hollows (2011) observe similar tensions around representation and power in Channel 4 series *Hugh's Chicken Run*, which saw chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall constructed as a 'people's champion' aiming to change consumer behaviour and corporate policy. Fearnley-Whittingstall's elite social and educational background further complicates class-based judgements underpinning the 'ideal' consumer he promotes. Bell and Hollows (2011) argue however that he appears 'authentic' as there is a lack of publicity around his personal life to disrupt the image he presents on television. Fearnley-Whittingstall is clearly able to accumulate celebrity capital, but benefits according to Bell and Hollows (2011: 180) from *not* being associated with a 'celebrity lifestyle'. This lends further support to the idea that acceptance as authentic is based more on consistent self-presentation than on congruence with those a celebrity claims to represent. There is certainly evidence to suggest viewers were convinced; demand for free range and organic chickens rose and polls showed consumer attitudes shifting (Hickman, 2008).

Fearnley-Whittingstall subsequently used his Channel 4 platform to support the 'Fish Fight' campaign, aiming to change consumer practices and convince citizens to lobby MEPs to change fishing laws. This is a further example of celebrity campaigning creating conflicting outcomes. The Fish Fight (2014) petition received 850,000 signatures and the campaign received support from politicians, charities, businesses and celebrities across Europe, leading to a change in EU law. Smaller successes include changes to

supermarket sourcing policies, increased sales of ‘undervalued’ fish, and 105,000 downloads of an app designed to help citizens make ‘sustainable choices’ (Fish Fight, 2014: 6-7). However Seafish which represents the UK seafood industry argued Fearnley-Whittingstall had oversimplified ‘the deeply complex area of marine conservation’ (Pickerell, 2014), and that increased consumption of other fish did not achieve the aim of reducing cod sales (Vaughn, 2011). While successes did not come without setbacks, the role of multiple media platforms in achieving them raises questions about media, technology, and prospective celebrity representatives that require further attention.

In the case of ‘Fish Fight’ both the scale and mechanisms of mobilisation are interesting, with a mainstream media platform used to encourage targeted social media actions. During the three days that series one of *Hugh’s Fish Fight* was broadcast on Channel 4 online petition signatures rose from 33,000 to 500,000, with 16,000 tweets sent to supermarkets during a single advert break (Fish Fight, 2014) Whilst this immediacy is impressive, the campaign’s ability to keep its network of ‘fish fighters’ engaged between the January 2011 series and the new EU Common Fisheries Policy becoming law in December 2013 is even more so. ‘Fish fighters’ were mobilised to tweet and email decision makers at crucial moments, with a tool built to enable citizens ‘to tweet every fisheries minister in Europe in their own language’ (Fish Fight, 2014: 25). Similarly while Naik (2008) argues Jamie Oliver had a ‘limited’ effect on the government’s agenda in practice, she notes that his Channel 4 series attracted a ‘fever pitch’ of supportive media coverage to the issue of school meals.

Thrall et al. question both the importance of mainstream media attention and the ability of celebrities to attract it on behalf of campaigns and organisations. They argue celebrity influence on news agendas is limited, as only ‘large, well-funded and established groups’ get significant coverage and this is rarely sustainable (Thrall et al., 2008: 372). Using Nexis searches to assess how many articles were published in US newspapers over

a 12 month period, they conclude celebrities are ineffective at ‘shaping the mainstream *political* news flow’ and ‘do little to bring political oriented advocacy into the celebrity news mix’ (Thrall et al., 2008: 372 - 381). They therefore argue organisations would benefit most using celebrities to ‘narrowcast’ longer-term goals to ‘small groups of motivated people’, rather than attempting to ‘make noise-make news-make change’.

As I have noted Panis and Van den Bulck’s work demonstrates the difficulty for celebrities and organisations in attracting attention for longer periods of time. Citizens are less sceptical of celebrity engagement with well-known organisations on a long-term basis, yet shorter-term commitments to ad hoc campaigns receive more media coverage (Panis and Van den Bulck, 2012; 2014). Which celebrities receive coverage is shaped by how well known they are, but also the ‘fit’ both between celebrity and campaign and with news values (Panis and Van den Bulck, 2014: 34). This demonstrates that even those with high celebrity capital may face difficulty exchanging it for political capital and other political benefits. The need to demonstrate consistency also raises the question of how celebrities attempt to do this, and the extent to which citizen evaluations of their representative claims are shaped by the political information cycles they spark.

While Wheeler (2014) asks whether celebrities’ use of social media can ‘reinvigorate politics’, therefore, there is a need to consider these platforms as just some of the media resources available – to differing degrees - to celebrity activists. My case studies consider the role of multiple platforms in the making and evaluation of celebrity representative claims. They show celebrities using social media both to bypass and also to attract mainstream media attention, and celebrities using these platforms to promote both their connection to *and* independence from government institutions. While celebrity capital is accumulated through recurrent media representations, whether mainstream media attention is required *and* such attention must be positive to facilitate the exchange of this capital also requires further investigation.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed the academic literature which has sought to define celebrity politicians and debate their democratic impact. While work by Street in particular has been valuable in challenging the argument that celebrities pose an inherent risk to representative democracy, literature proposing typologies cannot explain *how* celebrities move into the political field. The empirical work discussed here addresses a range of celebrity interventions, from endorsing politicians to leading single-issue campaigns. This provides some indication of which factors may influence the exchangeability of celebrity capital, with focus group work in particular providing valuable evidence over how celebrities are evaluated by citizens. While again unable to explain variation, this work demonstrates three key points. Firstly, the ability of celebrities to secure political recognition is not explained by their recognisability alone. Secondly, celebrities' political interventions *can* but do not always or exclusively result in political benefits for citizens. Thirdly that further work needs to consider the multiple media resources celebrities have at their disposal, without assuming these remove all barriers to field migration.

Moving on from typologies, I argue that Driessens' (2013) conceptualisation of celebrity as a form of capital provides a valuable analytical tool for asking how celebrities move between fields. This concept - and Bourdieu's theories of fields and capital in which it is grounded - guided my research as I set out to conduct case studies of celebrity interventions in the political field. In doing so I came up against the limits of celebrity capital for explaining *how* celebrities make these interventions, and *why* some receive recognition where others do not. These limits should perhaps have been obvious; as Driessens (2013) notes, the exchangeability of celebrity capital is not simply a matter of scale.

As I conducted the research presented in these case studies, an important pattern began to emerge. The perceived value of celebrity interventions to politicians and citizens *is* often based on how famous they are considered to be, or how many followers they have on social media. Crucially however, this is only the case where the celebrity is assumed to speak for others as a result. Examining the assumptions which underpin how celebrities are discussed, the centrality of representation to understanding how celebrity capital is attributed political value becomes clear.

I therefore argue that Street's (2004: 447) suggestion that it is 'at least conceivable that unelected persons may legitimately represent politically the views and values of others' requires further attention. In this thesis I argue such claims provide a mechanism through which celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital, if and when these claims are accepted. In this context, the literature discussed in this chapter provides a starting point for considering what factors may influence the making and evaluation of celebrity representative claims.

In the following chapter I return to Driessens' (2013) concept of celebrity capital, and situate it in Bourdieu's broader work on class, capital, and the political field. In doing so I demonstrate the connections between these theories and Saward's argument (2010) that political legitimacy is afforded by the acceptance of representative claims. On this basis, I present an original theoretical model for explaining how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital through claims to represent others.

3. Theoretical Framework: Explaining the Exchangeability of Celebrity Capital through Representative Claims

What is important in this context is how the claim to representative legitimacy is made. What *conditions* underlie the making of the claim by the unelected that they ‘represent’ a view or a constituency?

John Street (2004: 447)

This capacity to represent is instrumental in understanding how celebrity as a formation of contemporary individuality has migrated out of entertainment culture into a wider political culture

P. David Marshall (2014: xxxiii)

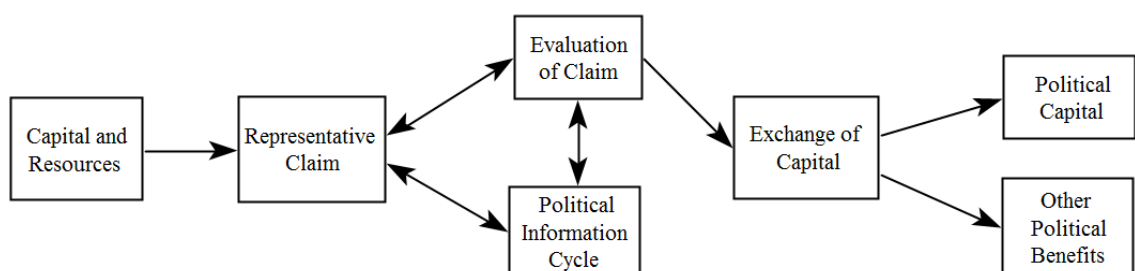
The role of representation in the relationship between celebrity and politics has long been suggested, but not fully conceptualised. P. David Marshall interrogates this connection (2014: 203), arguing that the need to ‘somehow embody the sentiments’ of others - a party or ‘people’ for the politician, an audience for the celebrity - is ‘one of the critical points of convergence’ between politics and entertainment. What happens however when we cannot easily differentiate between the people these actors claim to represent, or the domains in which they do so? Questions of representation have largely become lost as efforts to explain the movement of celebrities between entertainment and politics have turned to Bourdieu’s theories of fields and capital. The inability of these theories alone to explain the exchangeability of celebrity capital for political capital requires a return to considering representation as a point of connection.

In this chapter I set out the theoretical contribution emerging from the three empirical case studies presented in this thesis. I find that the value attributed to celebrity capital in the political field is predicated on celebrities’ claims to represent others. I therefore argue that Driessens’ (2013) concept of celebrity capital has greater explanatory power in political contexts when combined with Saward’s (2010) theory of representative claims. Exploring the implicit interconnections between Bourdieu and Saward I consider

the centrality of representation to the norms and practices of the political field, and how celebrities can secure political capital through claims to represent citizens.

While I argue that this combination of theories provides a sharper analytical tool for considering movement from entertainment to politics, it is clear from my case studies that variation according to other factors such as class endures. This is because while celebrity capital is a *necessary* resource for making representative claims, it is not the *only* resource. Bourdieu theorises that the exchangeability of *all* forms of capital is dependent not only on *how much* an agent possesses, but *how it was accumulated* and the norms of the field. In addition to arguing that the concepts of celebrity capital and representative claims should be combined, I propose a model for tracing the *process* of movement. This model is presented in Figure 3.1 below and also in section 3.7, where having discussed the relevant theories I describe each element of this process in turn. Having introduced Driessens' concept of celebrity capital in Chapter 2, I begin by situating it within Bourdieu's work and considering its limits as an analytical tool.

Figure 3.1. Explaining how Celebrity Capital is Exchanged for Political Capital



3.1 Bourdieu and the Social World: Fields, Capital, and Migration

While I argue this approach alone is insufficient, Bourdieu's theories of fields and capital provide an ideal base for developing a framework to explain how celebrities intervene in the political field. Bourdieu (1991) depicts the 'social world' as a 'multi-dimensional

space’ consisting of fields – such as the economic, cultural or political field - within and between which agents compete for positions. Fields function according to their own laws and attribute different value to different forms of capital. Just as agents’ positions within a field (which determine its structure) are the site of continuous struggle, so too are the boundaries *between* fields. The resulting hierarchy influences the movement of agents between fields, with the ‘hierarchies of legitimacy’ that Bourdieu (1993: 86) argues separates cultural forms also relevant for considering the exchangeability of celebrity capital as I discuss in section 3.3.

The position an agent holds in ‘social space’ is ‘defined by the position he occupies in different fields’, in turn determined by the capital they possess (Bourdieu, 1991: 230). Bourdieu defines capital as ‘power over a field (at a given moment)’, with types of capital acting as ‘trumps in a game of cards’ which ‘define the chances of profit in a given field’. Capital can be used to move ‘vertically’ within a field, but also horizontally or transversely between one field and another. Vertical movements ‘only require an increase in the volume of the type of capital already dominant’ in a field. Transverse or horizontal movements in contrast mean ‘a shift into another field’, and therefore the ‘reconversion of one type of capital into another or one sub-type into another sub-type’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 132). This is not necessarily a straightforward transaction, as ‘exchange rates’ for the conversion of capital vary ‘in accordance with the power relation between the holders of the different forms of capital’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 125).

Agents compete on the basis not only of the *volume* of capital they possess but also its *composition*, the types of capital accumulated. Forms of capital differ in value across fields, with a ‘current’ form acting as a ‘power or stake’ within each. However Bourdieu (1987: 4) describes economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital as ‘fundamental social powers’. While these first three are more tangible in spite of taking multiple forms – we can clearly think of money as economic capital, knowledge as

cultural capital, or contacts as social capital for example – symbolic capital is more abstract.

Symbolic capital – referred to as ‘recognition’ but also as ‘prestige’, ‘reputation’ or ‘fame’ (Bourdieu, 1991) – is not a tangible, exchangeable type of capital in and of itself. It is the form other types of capital take ‘once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate’ within a field (Bourdieu, 1987: 4). Symbolic capital consists of other capital when ‘misrecognized’ and therefore ‘legitimated’, with symbolic power only wieldable when it is ‘misrecognized as arbitrary’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 181-2). What is most pertinent about symbolic capital in the context of celebrity representatives is the role others play in its accumulation, maintenance and depletion. The ‘recognition’ Bourdieu (1991: 72) characterises as symbolic capital is the recognition - ‘institutionalized or not’ - an agent receives *from a group*.

Bourdieu argues that political capital is a form of symbolic capital. The ‘power of mobilization’ for which agents compete in the political field is a ‘competition for power’ based on possession of political capital (Bourdieu, 1991: 190-194). It is therefore political capital a celebrity needs to exchange capital accumulated in the field of entertainment for, in order to compete for positions in the political field themselves. Political capital is depicted as ‘*credit* founded on *credence* or belief and *recognition* or, more precisely, on the innumerable operations of credit by which agents confer on a person...the very powers that they recognize in him’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 192). This ‘political power’ is a ‘magical power’ derived ‘from the trust a group places’ in a politician, with recognition and credibility existing ‘only in and through representation, in and through trust, belief and obedience’. I examine this connection between political capital and representation in section 3.4, asking how celebrities can capitalise on the centrality of representation to the norms and practices of the political field.

Where does celebrity fit into field theory? While we can expect celebrities to generally possess higher economic and social capital than the general population - acknowledging of course that this varies - what is it about celebrity status specifically which affords movement within or between fields? Bourdieu (1991: 194) described ‘fame’ or ‘popularity’ as a ‘personal capital’, ‘based on the fact of being known and recognised in person’ and on maintaining a ‘good reputation’. Fame or renown is linked even more explicitly to symbolic capital in *The Field of Cultural Production*, where Bourdieu (1993: 183) describes positions within a field as based on ‘distribution of symbolic capital...“celebrity” and recognition’. This resource is ‘often the product of the reconversion of the capital of fame accumulated in other domains’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 194). Marshall (2014: xlviii) builds on this by observing that ‘the condition of celebrity status is convertible to a wide variety of domains’ including politics, giving ‘celebrity status’ power in these domains.

While Bourdieu describes a ‘reconversion of the capital of fame’, conflating celebrity with symbolic capital or ‘recognition’ suggests that celebrity is the *outcome* of exchange rather than a resource which can itself be converted for other forms of capital. As I noted in Chapter 2 this lack of consideration for the ‘convertibility’ of fame - as well as the question of how celebrities migrate between fields - led Driessens to conceptualise celebrity itself as a form of capital.

3.2 Celebrity Capital and its Value

By conceptualising celebrity as a form of capital we can consider it as a resource, which like other forms of capital can be exchanged in attempts to move within or between fields. Celebrity capital is ‘recognizability’ - accumulated as ‘media visibility through recurrent media representations’ - which needs ‘renewal and repetition’ or else it ‘quickly fades’ (Driessens, 2013: 552-3). Celebrity capital can be converted into other forms of capital, such as ‘economic capital as money...social capital as valuable contacts...symbolic

capital as recognition’ or ‘political capital as political power’ (Driessens, 2013: 555). This exchangeability clearly renders celebrity capital a valuable resource in many contexts and for many purposes. In this section I consider its exchangeability in political contexts, and set out the limitations of this concept for explaining how celebrities obtain political capital.

Why think about celebrity as a resource which can be *converted into* symbolic capital, rather than as a *type* of symbolic capital? Driessens provides two justifications that each have clear implications for celebrity capital’s relative value. Firstly in the context of symbolic capital ‘recognition’ does not simply mean to be ‘recognised’ in the sense of being familiar to others, but to be *recognised as legitimate* by others. While these may therefore overlap, it is clearly possible to be highly recognisable (to possess high celebrity capital) without being recognised as legitimate (possessing symbolic capital) in a given or even in any field. Secondly unlike symbolic capital celebrity capital is not ‘field specific’, but works ‘across fields’ (Driessens, 2013: 551), a key point for considering it as a resource affording field migration. This distinction also enables us to recognise that symbolic capital or ‘recognition’ will neither look the same nor be achievable through the same means in different fields, which in turn means celebrity capital will not be equally exchangeable across fields. This ‘differential recognition and importance of celebrity capital’ is something Driessens (2013: 553) argues ‘needs further explanation’. While unable to contrast the value or exchangeability of celebrity capital *between* fields, I use case studies to ask what factors explain the variation in its *political* value.

Understanding the value of celebrity capital in the political field requires attention to the norms and logics of this field. The varied exchangeability of celebrity capital across fields is also explained however by broader forces. Driessens (2013: 553) uses Couldry’s concept of media meta-capital to explain the ‘differential recognition’ of celebrity capital. Couldry (2003: 667) argues that ‘media power’ should be understood as a form of ‘meta-

capital’ - as Bourdieu argues is the case for the state - through which ‘media exercise power over other forms of power’. Media representations therefore influence ‘what counts as capital’ within fields – including what counts as symbolic capital and therefore recognition or prestige – in doing so also altering exchange rates ‘between the capital competed for in different fields’ (Couldry, 2003: 669). Media meta-capital would seem to influence both the *value* of celebrity capital in a given field, and also alter the ease (or otherwise) with which this capital can be used to move *between* fields.

We can expect for celebrity capital to be more valuable, and therefore more exchangeable, in mediatised fields where visibility and an understanding of media logics are fundamental resources for advancement (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). Couldry (2003: 669) argues that when media ‘intensively cover an area of life’ for the first time this alters the ‘internal workings’ of a field or sub-field. This reworking can be seen in convergence between entertainment and politics. Corner and Pels (2003: 2) argue the foregrounding of ‘style, appearance, and personality’ in ‘modern mediated politics’ has broken ‘down some of the fences that separate politics from entertainment and political leadership from media celebrity’. Considering Giles’ (2015) argument that some field boundaries are more porous than others this explains the porousness of boundaries between entertainment and politics, allowing for ease of movement across these interpenetrated fields. We could therefore expect celebrity capital to be easily exchangeable for political capital.

As Driessens (2013) notes however, and is clear from the literature discussed in Chapter 2, many efforts to exchange celebrity capital for political capital are unsuccessful. I argue that this is because agents who accumulated capital in the field of entertainment must still negotiate, and will be judged against, political norms in spite of convergence between entertainment and politics. There is no *single* media logic that creates linear outcomes in the political field (Couldry, 2012: 148), but instead multiple ‘competing yet

interdependent logics’ (Chadwick, 2017: 24). Media logics do not replace political logics but instead *interact* with them, in what Chadwick (2017: 24) describes as a ‘continual process of mutual adaptation and interdependence’ among actors across fields. The endurance of political norms is evident in the literature on how citizens evaluate celebrities discussed in Chapter 2, where questions surrounding seriousness demonstrated scepticism over their legitimacy. While the move into a more ‘elite’ field will always require a greater exchange of capital, fears of ‘trivialisation’ or ‘massification’ may particularly affect those seeking to work across entertainment and politics (Bourdieu, 1984). While I therefore agree with Corner and Pels (2003: 2) that boundaries have become blurred, my case studies do not suggest a ‘levelling’ of ‘the hierarchy between “high” political representation and “low” popular entertainment’.

This demonstrates a key limitation in theoretical work to date: the exchangeability of celebrity capital, and therefore its political value, is not simply a matter of scale. A celebrity’s ability to use capital accumulated through media representations to receive recognition in the political field is clearly dependent on more than simply *how much* they have in comparison to others. Driessens (2013: 555) acknowledges that the norms of a field influence exchangeability, as a celebrity may not possess ‘other forms of capital’ attributed higher value in a given field. A further ‘important constraint’ is that the exchange rate between different forms of capital is regulated by those ‘who take dominant positions’ in a field. Important questions therefore remain over how celebrity capital is attributed value in the political field, and the factors aside from volume that influence its exchangeability. This thesis seeks to add to our understanding of *what* and *whose* celebrity capital is more politically valuable, and to contribute a model for understanding *how* celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital. I now consider how the norms and structure of the political field may influence both how exchangeable celebrity capital is, and who is more able to exchange it for political capital.

3.3 Celebrity Capital and the Political Field: Class, Trajectory, and Hierarchy

This moves the question of how exchangeable celebrity capital is beyond the question of *how much* an agent has toward considerations of class, trajectory, and hierarchy. Bourdieu (1987: 4) theorised that agents are ‘distributed’ within and across fields not only according to their *volume* of capital and the *composition* of this but also their ‘*trajectory* in social space’: how capital was accumulated over time. The steepness of an agent’s trajectory is significant due to its connection to class. The closer agents are within a field the more likely they are to share similar trajectories, as ‘those who occupy the same positions have every chance of having the same habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1987: 5). Bourdieu (1990: 56-6) defines ‘habitus’ as ‘embodied history, internalized as second nature’ which ‘produces individual and collective practices’, ensuring the ‘active presence of past experiences’ and the endurance of social divisions. Agents’ practices and prospective positions are influenced by habitus as a ‘sense of one’s place’, which is also a ‘sense of the place of others’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 471; 1987: 5). This sense of social limitations is of clear importance if, as Bourdieu suggests, political capital is derived from acceptance by a group.

Though a celebrity may have accumulated high capital of various types in the field of entertainment, therefore, this will not necessarily bring parity with other agents in the political field. On economic capital Bourdieu (1984: 274) argues that ‘having a million does not in itself make one able to live like a millionaire’. Similarly cultural capital differs in value according to how it was accumulated, as ‘the autodidact...is ignorant of the right to be ignorant that is conferred by certificates of knowledge’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 329). The ‘specific logic of the field’ governs how ‘the relationship between class and practice is established’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 112-3), with agents in ‘similar positions’ developing ‘similar practices’ (Bourdieu, 1987: 6).

In the political field the relationship between class, language and practice entrenches hierarchies of exclusion, as those who possess the ‘legitimate manner’ hold ‘the power to define the value of manners’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 95). The enduring ‘sense of one’s place’ has clear political consequences. ‘The propensity to speak politically...is strictly proportionate to the sense of having the right to speak’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 411), and those who *do* speak but lack the legitimate competence and language are excluded (Bourdieu, 1991). ‘Legitimate competence’ is not easily attained, as Bourdieu (1991: 176) argues ‘nothing is less natural than the mode of thought and action demanded by participation in the political field’. While in this thesis I am not considering celebrities who seek to become ‘politicians’, these norms and practices have broader implications for those seeking political capital.

The consequences of political norms for celebrities can be seen in the research on young people’s perceptions of the ‘ideal’ celebrity politician discussed in section 2.3. While some celebrity engagement with politics was found to be welcome, normative perceptions of politics as ‘serious’ business and the ideal political actor as mature, masculine and entrepreneurial endure (Inthorn and Street, 2011; Loader et al., 2016; Manning et al., 2016). It is therefore unsurprising that Ribke (2015) found a celebrity’s ‘sociocultural background’ affects their ability to secure political office. He also argues however that this is not simply a question of the celebrity’s class trajectory, but also of the *relative prestige* associated with roles occupied in entertainment and those sought in the political field. In order to understand *who* is more able to exchange celebrity capital for political capital, we therefore need to consider *how* this capital was accumulated.

Bourdieu’s (1993) work on ‘cultural hierarchies’, in relation to the literary field, demonstrates how equally high volumes of capital are not equally ‘recognised’. This demonstrates a hierarchy of genres which renders some more legitimate and therefore more valuable in terms of symbolic capital than others. Bourdieu (1993: 48) describes a

‘negative relationship’ between ‘symbolic profit’ and ‘economic profit’ for writers, whereby ‘*discredit* increases as the audience grows and its specific competence declines’. Here symbolic capital is again linked to the *misrecognition* of other forms of capital, as greater ‘distance from profits’ brings greater prestige or cultural authority. This need to demonstrate ‘distance’ from economic capital - but not to *actually* possess little of it - is due to suspicion of the ‘popular’ as opposed to the prestigious. While Bourdieu (1993: 183) again uses ‘celebrity’ alongside ‘recognition’ to denote symbolic capital here, this suspicion of the popular demonstrates how in practice the two are often considered at odds.

Genre and skill are key elements of Rojek’s (2001) hierarchical typology of celebrity status as either ‘ascribed’, ‘achieved’, or ‘attributed’. ‘Achieved’ celebrity associated with skill, rather than simply with media attention, possesses ‘high cultural value’. For Rojek (2001: 12) further distinction between ‘celebrity, notoriety and renown’ is based on ‘social distance’, with the ‘honorific status’ of celebrity based on distance from the ‘spectator’ and a lack of ‘direct, personal reciprocity’ in the celebrity-audience relationship. While this relationship may be changing as even those with high celebrity capital can use social media to engage in ‘micro-celebrity practices’ (Marwick, 2015), distance is also a key part of Marshall’s discussion of genre and hierarchy. While the ‘film celebrity’ constructs distance from their audience the ‘television celebrity works to break down those distances’ and foster ‘familiarity’ with the audience (Marshall, 2014: 190). For Marshall (2014: 227) this hierarchy is a further point of connection between celebrities and politicians, as political leaders must ‘provide evidence of familiarity while providing evidence of exceptionality and hierarchical distance’. Hierarchies within and across entertainment and politics will therefore influence the process of movement between the two. This is particularly true for those ‘tainted’ by association with ‘mass

culture and mass entertainment’, even if they ‘emerge from these domains’ to those attributed higher cultural value (Marshall, 2014: 225).

This association between class and the value attributed to different genres has been demonstrated by work on a format with a strong (if not straightforward) connection to ‘the mass’: reality television. Skeggs and Wood (2011: 1) argue that popular commentary dismissing reality television as ‘trash’ inscribes ‘a set of assumptions about participants and viewers based upon hierarchies of culture’. It is important to consider these hierarchies at a time where celebrity is supposedly being ‘democratised’ by ICTs.² While ‘celebrity might be more available’ and celebrity capital therefore more readily accumulated, ‘this does not mean that it offers access to symbolic power’ (Skeggs and Wood, 2011: 22). Wood (2017: 44) argues the precarity-driven need of reality television participants to ‘constantly’ engage in other work to ‘extend their media visibility’ is intensified by needing to ‘work hard to defend’ their ‘devalued’ work. With Wood (2017) also arguing men associated with the genre have been able to secure more legitimate long-term means of accumulating economic capital than women, we can see how neither the accumulation nor exchange of capital is equally available to celebrities.

The classed and gendered hierarchies that influence how celebrities are compared and evaluated suggest not all celebrity capital is equally exchangeable for political capital. Mendick et al. (2018: 139) argue that fame is generally viewed ‘as an illegitimate and immoral aspiration’, but that young people ‘enact distinctions between “deserved” and “undeserved” fame’. Fame must be ‘legitimized’, with ‘legitimate celebrities’ those judged to have ‘worked hard and remained ‘authentic’ or ‘true to themselves’. Fame is also legitimated if ‘it is used to benefit others’ through ‘charitable giving, representing the nation or inspiring people’ (Mendick et al., 2018: 148). This raises the question of

² See Turner (2014) Chapter 3 for discussion of this debate over whether newer forms of media and genre, such as social media and reality television, are ‘democratising’ celebrity.

how – and which – celebrities are able to use celebrity capital to obtain *political* legitimacy by claiming to represent others. I now return to the centrality of representation to competition for political capital, arguing that Bourdieu's work on representation and the political field can be readily reconciled with Saward's theory of representative claims.

3.4 Celebrity Capital and the Political Field: Representation

We can compare political life to a theatre only on the condition that we envisage the relation between party and class, between the struggle of political organizations and class struggle, as a truly symbolic relation between a signifier and signified, or, better, between *representatives* providing a *representation* and the agents, actions and situations that are represented

Bourdieu (1991: 182)

While I have so far considered the norms and logics of the political field as barriers to exchanging celebrity capital, other norms reinforce connections between celebrity and politics. As I have noted Marshall (2014: 241) places representation at the core of 'convergence' between them, as the power of both 'popular culture figures and the realm of politics' stems from a 'capacity to embody the collective in the individual'. The centrality of representation to the inner workings of the political field connects acceptance as a representative to recognition as the receipt of political capital.

Bourdieu depicts political capital as a type of symbolic capital, and symbolic capital as taking the form of *recognition* within a particular field. The link to representation is clear, as symbolic capital is the 'recognition' an agent receives from a group (Bourdieu, 1991: 72), a 'credit' the group grants (Bourdieu, 1977: 181). Being the product of 'acts of recognition' and 'credit and credibility', political or symbolic power 'exists only in and through representation, in and through trust, belief and obedience' (Bourdieu, 1991: 192). This connection between the competition for political capital and ability to mobilise a group places representation at the heart of the political field. This can be seen in Bourdieu's (1991: 190) depiction of the political field as 'the site of a

competition for power carried out by a means of competition for...the right to speak for and act in the name of some or all of the non-professionals'. Competition is mediated largely through confrontation between the 'professionals of representation' acting 'as spokespersons for the groups at whose service they place their specific competence' (Bourdieu, 1987: 14). This is undertaken through the making and unmaking of groups, by 'producing, reproducing or destroying the representations that make groups visible for themselves or others' (Bourdieu, 1991: 125).

Two key points emerge from Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the relationship between representation and political capital. Firstly Bourdieu speaks not simply of politicians representing groups but *constructing* these groups. Bourdieu (1987: 15) argues that rather than existing objectively, a class group exists 'when there are agents capable of imposing themselves, as authorized to speak and act officially in its place and in its name'. Secondly, it is this constructed group from which the representative draws their political capital or their 'power of mobilization'. The politician 'derives his political power from the trust that a group places in him', and 'the power of the ideas he proposes is measured...by the power of the mobilization that they contain, in other words, by the power of the group which recognizes them' (Bourdieu, 1991: 190-2). While Bourdieu speaks of representation by political professionals and permanent organizations, we can expect that other agents seeking political capital also need to receive recognition from a group or groups. As the exchange of celebrity capital for political capital necessitates being recognized as representing others the question is *how* celebrities attempt to achieve this, *when* this is more likely to be accepted, and *what* this process looks like in practice.

Saward (2010: 51) notes that Bourdieu recognises a 'dark side' to this relationship between the representative and the (constructed) represented, as the latter 'lose control over the group in and through which they are constituted' (Bourdieu, 1991: 204). I agree with Saward (2010: 51) that 'constructions of the represented should not automatically

be regarded as suspect' and there is a need to examine 'whether intended constituencies become actual constituencies', in other words whether and by whom representative claims are accepted. Saward's theorisation of representative claims makes a vital contribution not only by paying greater attention to the 'spoken for' in this process, but by also taking a broader view of who can make claims to 'speak for'. There is, however, more complementary overlap between Bourdieu and Saward's depictions of representation as a process of discursive construction than Saward suggests.

While Bourdieu places strong emphasis on the power of representatives to construct the groups that lend them symbolic power, and on this as a form of domination and division, he does not suggest such groups are constructed from nothing. Bourdieu (1987: 16) claims the 'magical effect' words can have is that 'they can, if only for a time, make exist as *groups* collectives which already existed, but only in a potential state'. The key point of similarity for the purpose of this thesis is Saward's argument that while anyone can make a claim to represent others not all such claims will be accepted, either by the referent they invoke or by broader audiences. While this may seem obvious its theoretical importance lies in the connection we can draw, through Bourdieu, between *acceptance* as a representative and legitimacy in the political field.

In spite of Bourdieu's emphasis on the power that recognition from a group affords a political actor, *acceptance* is a necessary part of the process through which claims to representative status become claims to political capital. 'The symbolic efficacy of words', Bourdieu argues (1991: 116), 'is exercised only in so far as the person subjected to it recognizes the person who exercises it as authorized to do so'. Symbolic power is conferred when 'the addressees recognize themselves' in the spokesperson's words, enabling 'the words to come true' (Bourdieu, 1991: 191). This also occurs where the referent 'fails to realize that, in submitting to it, he himself has contributed, through his recognition, to its establishment' (Bourdieu, 1991: 116). Like Saward therefore

Bourdieu depicts ‘acceptance’ as taking multiple forms, with the ability to *claim* such acceptance necessary to receipt of recognition. Bourdieu does not rule out the possibility of ‘resistance’ to arguments to be spoken for – what Saward describes as ‘reading back’ (2010: 53) - containing ‘manipulation’ ‘within certain limits’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 464). The key here, considering my earlier discussion of political capital, is that this capital is afforded by connection to a group one can claim to speak for. For these claims to facilitate a process of exchange, an agent must be able to demonstrate their acceptance.

I therefore argue that there is a natural fit between Saward’s theory of representative claims and Bourdieu’s theorisation of the political field and its norms. With political capital predicated on recognition from a group, celebrity capital is attributed political value where the celebrity is accepted as speaking on behalf of others in the political field. Combining the concepts of celebrity capital and representative claims therefore helps to account for the inability of celebrity capital alone to explain how celebrities move into and within the political field. To understand how representative claims form the ‘missing link’ in this process I now discuss Saward’s theory, beginning with how representative claims are made and supported.

3.5 Constructing Representative Claims

The successful performance of representative claims lies at the core of political success

Saward (2010: 67)

In Chapter 2 I outlined Street’s (2004: 443) argument that celebrity should not be seen as at odds with ‘proper’ political representation, as representation is best understood ‘as both a political process and a cultural performance’. Saward’s (2010) conceptualisation of representation as something performed through ‘representative claims’ provides fertile ground for returning to Street’s (2004) questions of how celebrities ‘lay claim to represent’ others. Saward (2010: 3) agrees representation should not be seen as ‘a static fact of

electoral politics’, arguing that rather than asking what representation *is* we should be asking what representation *does* when it is invoked. This enables us to account for the ‘varied modes’ of claim to representative status made by unelected actors, and to explore Saward’s (2010: 22) argument that ‘a number of these carry potential democratic legitimacy’. At the core of Saward’s theory is the idea that anyone can *claim* to represent anyone or anything else, but that acceptance of representative claims is necessary for democratic legitimacy. In this section I discuss the structure of representative claims and the common tropes on which claims by unelected actors are based, considering the implications for celebrities.

A representative claim is ‘a claim to represent or know what represents the interests of someone or something’ (Saward, 2010: 38). While this is a simple and widely applicable definition, representative claims usually involve a multitude of actors. Saward (2010: 36) describes the ‘basic form’ of representative claims as being constructed by a ‘maker’, who claims that the ‘subject’ (the prospective representative) stands for an ‘object’. This ‘object’ is related to a ‘referent’. The ‘object’ is the maker’s idea of the claim’s constituency, while the ‘referent’ is ‘all the other things the constituency is, or might be’. Saward gives the example of an MP referring to his constituency (referent) as ‘good, hard working folk’ (object). Finally all claims are directed toward an ‘audience’, which ‘receives the claims and accepts, rejects, or ignores them’.

The maker and subject of a claim can be, but are not always, the same. My case studies contain examples where a celebrity is maker and subject, maker but not subject, *and* subject but not maker. In Chapter 5 for example we see Russell Brand claiming to represent his YouTube audience (subject and maker), Brand claiming that Ed Miliband represents this same audience (maker but not subject), and Miliband claiming that Brand represents those disillusioned with formal politics (subject but not maker). While I focus

on how celebrities construct claims to represent others all such claims are important, as they interact with and influence each other.

Makers do not simply construct representative claims, they also construct or ‘creatively constitute’ the constituencies claims refer to (Street, 2004: 450). The ‘depicting of a constituency *as* this or that, as requiring this or that, as having this or that set of interests’ lies ‘at the heart of the act of representing’ (Saward, 2010: 67). Constructing representative claims is rarely a single or simple act. Bourdieu (1991: 192-3) speaks of the ‘man of politics’ as ‘especially vulnerable to suspicions, malicious misrepresentations and scandal’ due to the dependence of his political capital on ‘delegation’ and ‘belief’. Throughout this thesis I refer simply to ‘constituencies’ for claims rather than objects, referents *and* constituencies. I note however the construction of multiple, overlapping constituencies, and the role of different actors in evaluating whether a celebrity speaks for a group.

As with the makers and subjects of claims, constituencies and audiences overlap to varying degrees. For example when making claims to represent residents of the New Era housing estate (1) Brand presented these claims to his social media followers (2) but also stated his intention to attract mainstream media attention (3) and provoke reaction from politicians (4). All four groups are part of Brand’s intended audience – those he hoped to reach through his claims - but clearly only 1 and 2 form part of the intended constituency whose interests he claimed to represent.

While I have structured this discussion of representative claims around making and evaluation, in practice these are not distinct. Saward (2010: 36) notes that while the elements of claims can be presented ‘in a linear relation’ it is in fact a more ‘circular’ process. Audiences – intended or otherwise – ‘are not simply passive recipients of claims’ and ‘may make counter claims about themselves’ or others ‘as subjects’. It therefore

makes sense that claim-makers often repeat, ‘adjust’ and ‘refine’ claims (Saward, 2010: 152). Claims made by different makers about the same subject – for example claims made by a celebrity but also by journalists, politicians, and citizens about the same celebrity – influence and feed off of each other in a cyclical fashion. I discuss how constituencies and audiences express acceptance (or otherwise) of claims in section 3.6.

Representation is an ‘ongoing process of making and receiving, accepting and rejecting claims – in, between, and outside electoral cycles’ (Saward, 2010: 36). Such claims are ‘destined to fail’ according to Bourdieu (1991: 111) if they do not ‘establish the relationship’ between the maker and the people which ‘authorize him’ to ‘pronounce’ them. I now discuss the claim types Saward depicts as being available to unelected actors and the resources which can support these, as makers attempt to define their relationship to constituents but often also to political institutions.

3.5.1 Claim Types and Supporting Resources for Unelected Actors

Following his argument that representation is not confined to elected representatives, Saward distinguishes between ‘electoral’ and ‘non-electoral’ claims. This is not to say they are distinct – they are ‘overlapping sets’ (Saward, 2010: 82) - but to acknowledge that an elected position is a strong resource which influences both how claims are constructed and evaluated. Saward (2010: 46) argues the most compelling claims ‘will be from “ready-mades”, existing terms and understandings that the would-be audience at a given time will recognize’. The elected politician will generally not need to ‘make his or her claims explicit’ as they ‘rest upon deeper institutional and constitutional structures’ affording them symbolic capital (Saward, 2010: 65). We can therefore expect celebrities to make more explicit claims to represent others, particularly in ‘new, controversial, or unfamiliar’ contexts (Saward, 2010: 60).

While politicians use votes, polling data and depictions of crowds among other resources to connect their image to ‘representations of the people’ (Marshall, 2014: 219), celebrities rely on other variations of these resources. Celebrities may however be well placed to benefit from disillusionment with ‘the politics of parties and politicians’ (Tormey, 2015: 7), and from limits to elective representation which Saward (2010: 92) argues ‘open up gaps which can be exploited’. The unelected are also able to make more creative and flexible claims, as they are not confined to electoral cycles or pledges, nor to particular geographical constituencies.

Saward (2010: 95) outlines three types of basis for non-electoral claims: ‘deeper roots’ claims based on group identity (e.g. religious officials) or permanent interests (e.g. civil servants); ‘expertise and special credentials claims’ based on ‘possession of authoritative knowledge’ (e.g. advocacy groups); and claims to represent ‘wider interests and new voices’. The third is the most clearly complementary to celebrity capital. Saward (2010: 99) uses Bob Geldof and Bono’s debt relief advocacy to illustrate claims to be a ‘surrogacy for wider interests’ based on the argument an ‘important perspective is not being heard or even voiced’. Claims can also be grounded in representing the ‘word from the street’, through tangible demonstrations of popular support particularly where connected to ‘grassroots techniques or events’. ‘Mirroring claims’ are grounded in ‘descriptive similarity between the claimant and the constituency’. This could be based on sharing key characteristics or identities and therefore understanding the group’s interests, or achieved through the use of public opinion polling or claims to ‘echo’ rather than speak for a group (Saward, 2010: 100). While this can be seen most explicitly in Brand’s claims in Chapter 4 to ‘amplify’ rather than to speak for New Era residents, mirroring claims of varying kinds exist across the cases presented in this thesis.

It is not just how a claim is constructed which matters, but the *resources* ‘of various kinds’ which support it (Saward, 2010: 72-3). Volume, types, and trajectory of

capital provide relevant (but not exhaustive) resources. Resources can be ‘unspoken background factors that facilitate the making of effective claims’, or ‘spoken and presented foreground factors that make up a good part of the character of the claim itself’. These two categories map onto the first two elements of my model for explaining the exchangeability of celebrity capital for political capital, as can be seen in section 3.7. Here ‘unspoken background factors’ become the capital and resources used to support a claim, while ‘spoken and presented foregrounded factors’ become discursive elements used to construct the claim. Again the two are not distinct, as the same resource can act as both. Celebrity capital is a background factor for example, but the celebrity could ‘foreground’ it by telling audiences their celebrity enables them to ‘give voice’ to others. Celebrities may also distance themselves from background resources as they construct claims, for example economic capital which disrupts a claim to mirror the interests of followers.

While the unelected have to ‘work harder to make their representative claims convincing’ (Saward, 2010: 94), celebrities will to varying degrees possess valuable resources others may not. Even if we should not assume that fans or followers of a celebrity will accept their claims, celebrities will need to ‘invoke and enthuse’ an audience but not to build one ‘from scratch’. Saward (2010: 148) argues that possessing the resources to ‘reach a wide group may be one crucial ingredient in a successful, and positively judged’ claim. Again we should not assume possessing media resources guarantees large or receptive audiences for claims, or enables celebrities to bypass criticism in mainstream media. Social media platforms may however provide some celebrities with a large audience not only to perform claims to but to refer to as a resource, lending them a connection to ‘representations of the people’ (Marshall, 2014: 219).

The literature discussed in section 2.5 showed how connection to mainstream media platforms can provide a reliable audience, also perhaps affording a celebrity

symbolic weight. It is not only connection to *political* institutions, therefore, which could support celebrity claims. Celebrities will however use ‘political strategies’ and discursive techniques to construct not only their relationship to citizens, but to political actors and institutions (Saward, 2010: 52). Some benefit from vital ‘constitutional and institutional resources’ by claiming a connection to elected officials and permanent political institutions. In other contexts the ‘familiar, emotional script’ of populist rhetoric could provide a resource, as even ‘partisan claims’ are dressed up in ‘non partisan clothing’ as an ‘everyday political strategy’ (Grattan, 2012: 198; Saward, 2010: 59). Finally celebrities may be better placed than others to use ‘creative capacity’ to support claims which are, after all, performed (Saward, 2010: 73). While none of this in any combination guarantees acceptance, celebrities possess a variety of resources – including but not limited to their celebrity capital – to support and construct representative claims.

The making and re-making of claims is not an easy task. Celebrities must use the resources that set them apart from the general population to support claims to speak for others, while risking contestation that these resources render them unable to do so. For Bourdieu (1991: 209), the ‘very definition of symbolic power’ is the ability to conceal that which elevates you while successfully claiming ‘ordinariness’. I use the case studies presented in this thesis to examine how celebrities construct representative claims in different contexts, and by comparing these draw conclusions over when such claims are more or less likely to facilitate the exchange of celebrity capital. As I have discussed, this exchange is predicated not simply on *making* representative claims but on their *acceptance* by others. How claims are constructed is only therefore a significant question in light of how this shapes their evaluation by constituencies and audiences.

3.6 Evaluating Claims: Authenticity, Authority and Legitimacy

What would be an "irresponsible discourse" in the mouth of one person is a reasonable forecast when made by someone else

Saward (2010: 48) is unequivocal on the importance of evaluation: ‘representative claims can only work, or even exist, if audiences acknowledge them in some way, are able to absorb, reject, or accept them, or otherwise engage with them’. As I noted earlier both audiences and constituencies play a role in the cyclical process of claim-making and evaluation. There is both an *intended* constituency – the group the maker ‘claims to speak for’ and ‘also speaks about’ – and an *actual* constituency as others may ‘recognize their interests as being implicated’ (Saward, 2010: 148). Similarly there is an *intended* audience – the group the claim is deliberately directed toward – and an *actual* audience, all those who ‘receive (hear, hear about, read, etc.) the claim and...are in a position to choose to respond’ (Saward, 2010: 49). Intended and actual audiences and constituencies are often but not always tightly connected. Just as it is ‘not up to the claimant to restrict...the range of people who regard their interests as implicated’ (Saward, 2010: 148), efforts to target or to limit an audience cannot be guaranteed.

Knowing whether claims have been accepted is not straightforward, particularly outside of the electoral sphere where makers can draw on election results and opinion polls. Acceptance is sometimes displayed ‘overtly’, with some ‘acceptance events’ clearer and more noticeable than others, but can also be ‘taken as tacit’ (Saward, 2010: 152). Silence ‘can mean consent in particular circumstances’, or we can expect at least that claim-makers would present such silence from constituencies as acceptance. There may be discrepancy in evaluations where an ‘invoked constituency’ largely accepts a claim while a ‘broader audience’ expresses ‘serious scepticism’. Expressions of scepticism over, resistance to, or explicit rejection of claims are termed ‘reading back’ by Saward (2010: 53-4). All claims are open to ‘a counterclaim or a denial’ by constituents who may not recognise the group invoked, their own belonging to it, or the right of the maker to speak for it.

Why does it matter whether claims are accepted, beyond the ability I argue this affords a celebrity to obtain political capital? From the perspective of constituents invoked in a claim, there exists not only the potential for others to represent their interests or circumstances but also to *misrepresent* them. Through case studies I demonstrate there *can* be clear benefits for those invoked in celebrity claims, which is why the model presented in section 3.7 shows not only ‘political capital’ but also broader ‘political benefits’ as a potential output of exchanging celebrity capital. Returning to political capital, it is necessary to pay further attention to how acceptance of representative claims is connected – or as I argue *can* and *should be connected* – to recognition in the political field.

Asking whose evaluations of a claim ‘should count’, Saward (2010: 148) argues the intended and actual constituencies form the ‘appropriate constituency’. This stems from his argument about how or when representative claims (and therefore their makers) receive ‘democratic legitimacy’. The potential for the unelected to achieve this is a core aspect of Saward’s argument (2010: 84), yet he notes the difficulty of describing claims as legitimate (or otherwise) with much certainty or conceptual clarity. For Saward (2010: 144), democratic legitimacy is afforded by the ‘acceptance’ of claims ‘by appropriate constituents, and perhaps audiences, under certain conditions’. This is therefore ‘perceived legitimacy’, and is ‘provisional’ rather than permanent (Saward, 2010: 159).

I argue a clear connection can be made between Saward’s tentative discussion of democratic legitimacy as the outcome of accepted representative claims, and Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of political capital as recognition received from a group. These ideas fit not only because of their predication on the acceptance of a group constructed by the agent, but also because such recognition is provisional. Just as political capital can be accrued, it can be lost; as credit can be given, it can be withdrawn (Bourdieu, 1977: 182). Connecting field theory with representative claims therefore not only makes celebrity

capital a more valuable analytical tool in political contexts, but also clarifies and strengthens the relationship between representative claims and democratic legitimacy.

So how might those who receive claims assess their acceptability? As Saward (2010: 104) distinguishes between electoral and non-electoral claims he associates key 'modes of reception' with each, with non-electoral claims often assessed with reference to 'authorization' and/or 'authenticity'. 'Authorization' is associated with the 'institutional positioning' of the maker within 'formal and informal structures', whether they are 'connected' to institutions in 'a way that may bolster a sense that they are authorized actors'. For unelected claim-makers, 'connection' to 'more conventionally legitimate structures' may 'moderate' perceptions such claims are 'loose cannon' or 'unaccountable'. While claim-makers can benefit from *proximity* to formal politics, audiences looking to 'discern authenticity' do so on the basis of distance or 'independence' from 'governmental institutions'. Asking whether makers are 'who they present themselves to be' and claims 'ring true', independence is associated with being 'un beholden to other interests' (Saward, 2010: 107). Credibility here is not associated with 'connection', therefore, but an 'air of "untaintedness"' through lack of association with formal politics.

Saward's theorisation of how audiences assess 'authenticity' is clearly supported by research discussed in section 2.3. Focus group research found that political work not 'being part of someone's job' and freedom from 'the need to secure electoral support' were markers of perceived authenticity (Inthorn and Street, 2011: 481; Loader et al. 2016: 414). It therefore seems likely celebrities can construct 'attractive' claims based on opposition to, or simply distance from, formal politics (Saward, 2010: 109). However the balancing act between authorisation and authenticity may be more challenging than this suggests. Young citizens still sought 'serious' representatives, and evaluated celebrity

politicians according to formal political norms (Inthorn and Street, 2011; Loader et al., 2016).

When claim-makers are celebrities, acceptance on the grounds of ‘authenticity’ may be more complex than simply ascertaining ‘independence’. Bourdieu (1991: 193) argued perceived authenticity ‘can only be conserved at the cost of unceasing work’, due to a ‘constant need’ for public personalities to ensure they ‘neither say nor do anything...that might show up their inconsistency over time’. Marwick (2013) argues perceived authenticity is based less on revelation of a ‘true self’ and more on consistent self-presentation across all aspects of mediated life. For celebrities Thomas (2014) finds social media communication is deemed inauthentic when inconsistent with an established ‘star image’, paradoxically encouraging social media strategies that are more managed rather than less. Returning to authenticity as independence, this may also require constructing independence from economic interests. Banet-Weiser (2012: 5) argues that while authenticity is itself a brand, it is a valuable one due to desire for ‘genuine affect and emotions’ that lie ‘outside of consumer culture’. This has clear implications for those whose capital is based on media representations and often wealth, but who must avoid accusations of ‘self-promotion’ in order to appear authentic (Mendick et al., 2018).

This presents celebrity claim-makers with a challenge. Consistent self-presentation across ‘multiple media’ with ‘multiple goals’ is hard work (Marwick and boyd, 2010; Turkle, 2011: 183), further complicated as I have discussed by political and cultural hierarchies. Loader et al.’s (2016: 409) argument young citizens want representatives to be ‘serious’ but also ‘one of us’ illustrates the difficulty of balancing proximity and distance from formal politics. Social media enables practices that appear to reduce distance between celebrities and audiences (Marwick, 2015), but this also requires negotiation as status is predicated in part on ‘hierarchical distance’ (Marshall, 2014; Rojek, 2001). Access to multiple media is therefore both valuable resource and

considerable challenge in constructing representative claims. We also need to consider the role of other media actors in the process of evaluation, and whether it is possible for celebrities to control this.

3.6.1 Situating Claims in Political Information Cycles

While the cyclical nature of representative claims is difficult to describe, their making and evaluation is not a simple nor single movement from maker to audiences. Nor are claims only received and evaluated by the ‘appropriate constituency’ for assessing their democratic legitimacy. Saward (2010: 149) notes the role of ‘*audiences* of other citizens’ – including but not limited to ‘members of the observing media’ – not only in evaluating claims but also in whether and how the intended constituency ‘receives and reacts’ to them. As audiences are involved in the ‘debate, deliberation, or dissemination’ of claims, makers ‘have varied, and never complete control over how their claims are communicated’, received, or interpreted (Saward, 2010: 150; 49). As I noted in Chapter 2 we need to consider how citizens actually receive claims in a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017). Focus group research has shown political statements do not move simply from celebrity to citizen, as young people experience them ‘in snippets and blurs’ across platforms (Nisbett and DeWalt, 2016: 152-4). I build on Saward’s theory by examining this process empirically, in the context of celebrity claims to represent others. Through case studies I ask not only how celebrities construct claims but the role of media and technology in both their making and evaluation, and whose judgments influence the process of claim-making and exchange.

I explore these claims and counterclaims, expressed and received through multiple media by a multitude of actors, in context of the political information cycles they spark. Chadwick (2017: 63-5) presents political information cycles as a move away from the traditional conception of news cycles toward ‘complex assemblages’, involving ‘greater numbers and a more diverse range of actors’. Cycles are ‘characterised by more

complex temporal structures’ and the remediation of content across platforms, also more often including ‘non-elite participants’. In the context of news stories Chadwick argues many ‘non-elite’ actors ‘interact exclusively online in order to advance or contest specific news frames’, and that political information cycles are ‘becoming the systemic norm for the mediation of important political events’. With Saward (2010) advocating for seeing representation as deriving from performative events, claims that need to reach and be evaluated by audiences, the concept of political information cycles is well suited to this context. This approach enables me to assess how celebrities use different modes of and platforms for communication, and the degree to which they can control or ‘re-make’ these claims as other actors remediate and potentially repudiate them.

It is particularly important to consider the role of media in claims made by celebrities, agents who have built careers *through* media and seek to exchange capital accumulated through media representations. Turner (2014: 74-5) argues social media platforms can be used as ‘image management’ tools by celebrities to multiple ends: to ‘take advantage of unmediated communication with their fans’, ‘shape what the rest of the media say about them’, and sometimes to ‘bypass even their own agents and public relations staff’. Similarly in all three cases I consider in this thesis social media is used to bypass mainstream media and target claims to specific audiences, to attract mainstream remediation of claims to increase their reach, or both.

Neither of these approaches can be guaranteed to work, or to work without risk of ‘reading back’. As Driessens (2013) distinguishes between *recognition* and *recognisability*, we can ask whether *all* celebrity capital is equally exchangeable for political capital or whether negative coverage hinders this process. Turner (2014: 83) discusses how celebrity content has grown across the news media market, but argues it is the publications most associated with promoting celebrities with whom they have the most ‘fraught’ relationship: the tabloid press. The relationship between tabloids and

celebrities (or perhaps with certain celebrities) remains a ‘see-sawing pattern of scandalous exposures and negotiated exclusives – at one point threatening the professional survival of the celebrities they expose, and at another point contracting to provide them with unparalleled personal visibility’. This tension between the need to attract attention to representative claims and the need for such claims to be accepted, not necessarily resolved by the access some have to large social media followings, is one my case studies will explore.

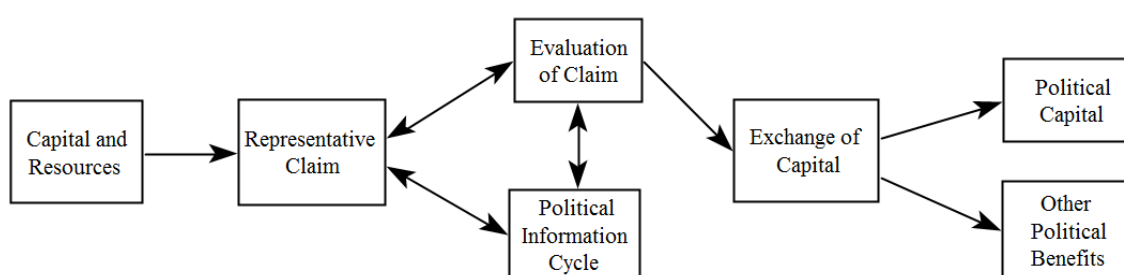
In this chapter I have discussed the theories from which I have developed a model for explaining how celebrity capital is exchanged for political capital. I have argued that while celebrity is generally seen to be of low political value, it is attributed political value where the celebrity is accepted as speaking for others. Acceptance of representative claims is a mechanism for political legitimacy due to the connection we can draw with Bourdieu’s concept of political capital, recognition an agent receives from a group they themselves construct. Hierarchies of legitimacy both within and across the fields of entertainment and politics mean this process will not work in the same way for different celebrities, who possess differing combinations of resources and capital to support and construct claims. The process of evaluation will be influenced not only by these resources, and celebrities’ past performances across fields, but also by the political information cycles claims (may) spark. I now return to the model introduced at the start of this chapter, briefly summarising each element of the process it presents in turn.

3.7 Explaining the Exchangeability of Celebrity Capital through Representative Claims

Figure 3.2 below shows the key contribution of this thesis: a model for explaining how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital through representative claims. This model emerged from the three case studies presented in Chapters 4-7, which provide illustrations of this process at work in varied political contexts. Comparing these cases

enables me to consider which key factors influence this process: in which contexts are claims more likely to be accepted, and celebrity capital exchanged for political capital? Having noted that citizens and often politicians are also implicated in this process of claim-making and exchange, I also ask what other political benefits can result from it. I now draw on the theoretical discussion set out in this chapter to outline each element of this model.

Figure 3.2. Explaining how Celebrity Capital is Exchanged for Political Capital



3.7.1 Capital and Resources: Supporting Claims

The model shown in Figure 3.2 above begins with the elements of representative claims that cannot necessarily be seen, the capital and other resources the celebrity brings to the process. This is what Saward (2010: 72-3) refers to as ‘unspoken background factors that facilitate the making of effective claims’. This includes celebrity capital but also other types of capital the claim-maker possesses, such as economic, social and cultural capital. The celebrity does not simply bring their capital to this process, but also how this was accumulated. Habitus and trajectory, past performances across fields, and association with specific genres and roles in the field of entertainment are also therefore relevant factors.

Celebrities also possess other potentially valuable resources, chiefly performative skills and access to different media organisations or platforms. Though representative claims are ‘backed by resources’ (Saward, 2010: 73), it is not only capital and resources which *support* claims that the celebrity brings to this process. ‘Background factors’ may

influence how claims are evaluated regardless of whether they support claims, or are factors the celebrity also chooses to ‘foreground’ as they construct them.

3.7.2 Representative Claims: Constructing Claims and Constituencies

The second part of this process is the element of representative claims you *can* see, or at least that the claim-maker hopes *will be seen* by their intended audience: the celebrity’s performances of claims to represent others. Here some of the resources supporting the claim become ‘spoken and presented foreground factors that make up a good part of the character of the claim itself’ (Saward, 2010: 73), as the celebrity seeks to construct claims which will be convincing to constituencies and audiences. These ‘foregrounded factors’ include language and cultural references, with celebrities potentially drawing on the claim types available to unelected actors I discussed in section 3.5.

The celebrity not only claims capacity to act as a representative but also constructs the group(s) they claim to represent - their intended constituency - and their relationship to it. This is not simply a case of referring to a group and claiming to speak for it, but of attributing characteristics and interests to this constituency. In Chapter 5 for example Martin Freeman does not simply claim to share the interests of the ‘normal’ voter, but constructs this citizen as patriotic, community-focused, and sceptical of party politics. In constructing claims, the celebrity also negotiates their distance both from formal political institutions and actors *and* from those they claim to represent. The final key element of claim-making to consider is the media resources the celebrity uses to perform claims. This naturally depends in part on the resources available to them, but as we see in Chapters 4 and 6 the same celebrity may choose to use different platforms for different purposes.

3.7.3 Evaluation of Claim

Claims are then evaluated by those who receive them, whether or not they are part of the intended or actual constituency. These evaluations may be vocal or visible, either expressions of overt acceptance or ‘reading back’ (contestation) of a claim (Saward, 2010: 53). As Saward (2010: 152) notes however acceptance can also be taken as ‘tacit’. This, along with the involvement of broader audiences in passing judgement over claims, complicates the question of how celebrities advance from evaluation of claim to exchange of capital.

While taking Saward’s (2010: 148) argument that it is acceptance of claims by ‘appropriate constituencies’ that renders them democratically legitimate, other actors’ evaluations - usually journalists and politicians - also play a key role in this process in the cases I discuss. We see this for example in Chapter 4, where the political information cycle becomes dominated by debate over who – Russell Brand or *The Sun* newspaper – can legitimately claim to speak for ‘the people’. This is why Figure 3.2 does not simply show provisional movement from evaluation of representative claims to exchange of celebrity capital, but incorporates the role of political information cycles in how claims are made and evaluated.

3.7.4 Political Information Cycle

Representative claims made by celebrities spark political information cycles. At least, my case studies show that *successful claims* spark political information cycles, though not all claims that do so are accepted. The ability of celebrities to obtain political capital is based on accepted claims to represent others, their celebrity capital therefore attributed political value through representative claims. I find therefore that celebrities *must* demonstrate an ability to accumulate celebrity capital in order to make acceptable claims. While celebrity capital is not sufficient, claims that do not receive media attention - or perhaps visible interest on social media - will not result in exchange for political capital.

Situating representative claims within political information cycles allows us to examine how they are made, evaluated, and re-made by a range of actors across mediums and platforms. This acknowledges that celebrities will never have ‘complete control’ over their claims (Saward, 2010: 49), and that audiences will often not receive them ‘first hand’. The bidirectional arrows in the model presented in Figure 3.2 above demonstrate the potential for claims to move in a circular fashion between construction, evaluation, and the political information cycles they spark.

3.7.5 Exchange of Capital

If the celebrity can demonstrate acceptance of their representative claims, their capital (including their celebrity capital) is exchanged for political capital. As political capital is a form of symbolic capital this could also be expressed not as an exchange, but as the recognition of their capital as legitimate within the political field (see section 3.1). It is this exchange of capital that affords the celebrity not simply the ability to intervene in the political field, but to receive recognition as a legitimate political actor. This therefore enables the celebrity to work across the fields of entertainment and politics.

3.7.6 Political Capital

Where successful the key outcome of this process for the celebrity is the receipt of political capital. The celebrity therefore goes from simply being recognisable to being *recognised* as a political actor. To possess political capital is to possess the most valuable form of capital for engaging in competition with other political actors, increasing the celebrity’s ‘power of mobilization’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 190). The ‘authority in the political field’ which comes with political capital grants the celebrity greater resources for further movements within the political field, or between this and other fields (Bourdieu, 1991:194). Ribke (2015: 108) finds a ‘cumulative effect’ at work, as celebrity interventions that ‘share some of the same characteristics’ as successful migrations benefit from a ‘sense of tangibility’. A celebrity who has previously made accepted

representative claims would not only have greater political capital, but also subsequently be able to make more familiar and therefore better-supported representative claims.

Neither political capital nor the acceptance of representative claims is permanent, as symbolic capital is a 'credit' lent by others that can readily be withdrawn (Bourdieu, 1977). The successful making of representative claims does not bring permanent legitimation, and claims must be continually remade. The position of celebrities who do not possess a formal position in the political field will be particularly precarious, and in spite of increased political capital the same barriers remain to attempts at 'vertical movement' to positions of higher political authority. This can be seen in the contrast between how Russell Brand made claims and how these were evaluated in Chapters 4 and 5, where recognition as a representative of grassroots movements did not afford legitimacy in the elite domain of electoral politics.

3.7.7 Other Political Benefits

Political capital is unlikely to be the only outcome of this process, as when celebrities make claims to represent others in the political field citizens are *always* implicated. As claims are often constructed in connection or opposition to political actors or institutions we also need to consider their implications for these actors, and for their own relationship with citizens. The final stage of the model therefore includes not only political capital, but also 'other political benefits' as a potential outcome. This is broadly defined to encompass outcomes for all those the celebrity claims to speak for or about, or who see themselves as implicated in these claims.

In each case study I consider not only how representative claims were made and evaluated, but also what other outcomes resulted from this process. In doing so I contribute to the debate discussed in Chapter 2 over the democratic implications of celebrity politics. Literature on single-issue campaigns in particular highlighted that while

celebrity involvement can be influential, positive and negative outcomes often co-exist. There is therefore a need to consider all outcomes, not only those which are beneficial or intended. This literature also demonstrated the importance of going beyond the headlines in assessing the outcomes of celebrity interventions, as the celebrity's campaign successes can be overstated while those of other representatives are diminished. This potential for celebrity representative claims to have multiple outcomes is demonstrated in my first case study, of Russell Brand's efforts to 'amplify' a grassroots housing campaign.

4. ‘At least he’s doing something’: was Russell Brand able to ‘Amplify’ the Voices of Housing Campaigners?

All I’m doing is standing there getting the camera to come, that’s all I’m doing...The media are interested in amplifying the message of people who already have power. The big businesses are interested in hiding the truth, the politicians are interested in empty rhetoric. We’ve gotta be interested in the different thing, representing one another in whatever way we can.

Russell Brand (2014i)

On December 1st 2014, Russell Brand marched to Downing Street. He posed as he has often done for press photos, and took selfies to be shared with his 11 million Twitter followers. Brand appears somewhat out of place in these images, not simply as an anti-establishment comedian on the doorstep of power but as a wealthy male celebrity sharing a moment of success with three ordinary women and their children. Together they held the signatures of almost 300,000 citizens petitioning to save the residents of the New Era housing estate from eviction. 18 days later it was announced that US property company Westbrook Partners would sell the estate to Dolphin Living, a charitable foundation that pledged all residents could continue life at New Era. As a shortage of affordable housing in the UK continues to put those on lower incomes at risk of homelessness (Shelter, 2017), residents’ fight to stay in Hoxton held significance beyond the 93 families who facing eviction.

Brand brought a wealth of celebrity capital and an interesting set of media resources to the campaign, including a popular YouTube series dedicated to political discussion. He perceived his representative role in the campaign as being to ‘amplify’ residents’ voices, lending them access to his social media platforms and seeking to attract positive mainstream media attention. Campaign leader Lindsay Garrett (2014) reflected that she didn’t ‘think we’d be here without Russell Brand’s support’, citing the ‘bigger audience’ and ‘amount of publicity’ he afforded them as key to their success.

In this chapter I analyse the political information cycle around the campaign's march to Downing Street, to examine how Brand attempted to 'amplify' the voices of the New Era residents and to what extent this aim was achieved. Combining this with participant observation of protests, I assess how Brand negotiated claims to represent the campaign, and how these were evaluated by journalists, activists, and residents themselves. While the sale of the estate was welcomed by residents and covered as a victory, I also ask which of the actors involved benefitted from the campaign. These case-specific questions enable me to assess whether Brand was able to exchange celebrity capital for political capital in this context, and consider what factors influenced this process.

While this case demonstrates the tensions between celebrity capital and grassroots campaigning, by seeking to 'amplify' rather than speak for residents Brand acknowledged these tensions. He also negotiated claims by drawing on class-based 'descriptive similarity' to residents (Saward, 2010: 100), and using populist rhetoric as a resource to position himself among citizens. However I find that rather than 'amplifying' New Era Brand's arguments with journalists dominated coverage, as the tabloids with which he has a combative relationship contested his claims on the grounds of wealth. Brand's repeated efforts to use social media to intervene in the political information cycle show he was able to attract attention, but unable to control the agenda. These arguments over Brand's economic capital formed the crux of an underlying debate over whether he could claim to represent campaigners.

Most importantly however, Brand was able to demonstrate overt acceptance from New Era residents and the supporters he helped them to mobilise. This enabled Brand to exchange celebrity capital for political capital in this case, a recognition that grew as the sale of the estate was covered as 'vindication' against his critics. Beyond New Era, this case demonstrates the intrinsic interconnection between representative claims and how celebrity capital is attributed political value.

4.1 Context and Theoretical Expectations

4.1.1 Brand: *The Joker*

Brand's two autobiographies tell the story of a working-class boy from Essex who relentlessly pursues fame (2007; 2010). Brand (2010: 121) describes how his swift upward trajectory toward Hollywood was assisted by years 'on smaller platforms and doing small stand up gigs', where he crafted 'a vocabulary, a manner of speech, a style of dress, a hairstyle, an ideology, all in alignment'. Brand learned to 'capitalise' on newer platforms such as digital radio and television and develop a relationship with audiences who deliberately 'sought him out' (2010: 121), something he has continued through social media.³

Brand was therefore able to combine wide recognisability in the UK with micro-celebrity practices. While celebrities who became famous through broadcast media often use social media to 'bypass the traditional brokers of celebrity attention' Brand has gone further (Marwick, 2015: 333), using YouTube to cultivate a personal audience for political content. These resources support Brand's claims to be able to 'amplify' the voices of citizens to broader audiences. Social media may also enable Brand to 'narrowcast' claims to intended constituents – citizens seeking to challenge austerity politics – an approach Thrall et al. (2008) argue is more effective than seeking to place a cause on political and entertainment news agendas. In spite of his combative relationship with the UK tabloid press, Brand clearly perceived attracting positive mainstream media coverage as necessary to the campaign's success.

As a recovering drug and alcohol addict whose hypersexual media persona matched an off-screen sex addiction Brand became a regular tabloid feature, a role both gladly courted and openly cursed. In 2010 he described *The Sun* as being like an old friend

³ In December 2014, at the height of the New Era campaign, Brand had 11 million followers on Twitter and over 1 million subscribers to his YouTube channel.

you ‘fucking hate’, while joking the *Daily Mail* considered him a ‘heroin addict fornicator with no respect for the system’ (Brand, 2010: 258). Brand epitomises the fraught relationship Turner depicts (2014: 83), between celebrities and the tabloids which offer ‘unparalleled personal visibility’ while threatening their ‘professional survival’. This was evident during the 2008 ‘Sachsgate’ scandal, after Brand and fellow BBC radio presenter Jonathon Ross left a voicemail on actor Andrew Sachs’ phone joking about Brand’s sexual relationship with Sachs’ granddaughter. Arthurs and Little note the role of the *Daily Mail* in orchestrating a backlash ‘framed within a discourse of moral decline’ (2016: 62-4), leading to 55,000 complaints, discussion in parliament, and Brand beginning ‘every TV news broadcast’ (2010: 259). While Brand’s upward trajectory in the field of entertainment continued, he reflected missing the platform radio afforded him to ‘redress’ the tabloid ‘propaganda war’ (2010: 114). During New Era Brand attempted to use social media to re-make representative claims in the face of contestation from these tabloids. His aim to ‘amplify’ New Era was complicated by his inability to shift his relationship with these publications, with which he was now politically as well as personally at odds.

Brand’s social media following – which included three times as many Twitter followers than all MPs combined (Miller, 2015) - could support his representative claims in other ways. Brand’s media resources enable him to ‘reach a wide group’, a ‘crucial ingredient’ in making ‘positively judged’ claims (Saward, 2010: 148), with the ‘metrics of social media success’ enabling Brand to refer to a tangible audience of presumed supporters (Marwick, 2015: 343). While Brand lacked the regular mainstream media platform which supported other celebrity-led single-issue campaigns (see section 2.5.2), ‘independence’ from mainstream media and political parties may support Brand’s claims to be an authentic ‘unbeholden’ representative (Saward, 2010: 107). In a field where recognition is based on ability to claim the support of a group, therefore, Brand’s media resources should support the exchangeability of his celebrity capital for political capital.

Not all political norms work to Brand's advantage. The negative coverage Brand attracted during New Era focused on the apparent 'hypocrisy' of his wealth, but also referenced Brand's history of salacious behaviour. Having accumulated his celebrity capital as a controversy-courting comedian, its exchangeability may be hindered by normative perceptions of politics as 'serious business' (Inthorn and Street, 2011; Loader et al., 2016; Manning et al., 2016). The interaction between hierarchical norms in the fields of entertainment and politics may also present a barrier to political capital (Marshall, 2014; Ribke, 2015), due to Brand's association with the 'low status' genre of stand-up comedy (Arthurs and Little, 2016: 70). Brand's working-class background complicates receiving recognition in a field where status is based on possessing the 'correct' language and practices, and agents typically share a trajectory with those occupying similar positions (Bourdieu, 1984; 1987). Brand draws attention to this tension in his performances. In a satirical response to the 'Parklife!' meme, which mocked his characteristically wordy manner of speaking and estuary accent (see Hooten, 2014), Brand joked that you 'can't be polysyllabic or talk about important things unless you went to school in a top hat and tails' (Russell Brand, 2014e).

Brand has always integrated political themes into his work, his 'relentless pontificating on revolution' receiving 'a lot of deserved abuse' (2010: 244). Following personal and professional disappointment in Hollywood, and a growing disillusionment with wealth and fame (see Arthurs and Little, 2016), 'revolution' became the core of Brand's career.

4.1.2 Brand: Agitator and Housing Activist

Since 2013 Brand has accumulated much celebrity capital through interventions in the political field. After guest editing the *New Statesman* – chosen theme 'revolution' - he appeared on BBC *Newsnight* in October 2013. This interview with Jeremy Paxman, which saw good-natured but heated debate over Brand's admission he had never voted,

has been viewed on YouTube over 11.5 million times (BBC Newsnight, 2013). Within a year Brand had published *Revolution* (2014), a book drawing parallels between his personal transformation away from drugs, wealth and fame, and a proposed political transformation away from capitalism toward community.

Brand certainly demonstrates that celebrities must work hard to make their representative claims convincing. In his most recent book *Recovery*, Brand anticipates dismissal of his advice by arguing he is qualified to give it because he is ‘worse’ than the reader rather than ‘better’ (2017: 14-6). Arthurs and Shaw show Brand positioned himself as a voice ‘of the people’ during the Paxman interview (2016: 4-6), arguing his legitimacy is based on ‘creatively constituting a political constituency’ for which he constructs himself as ‘authentic anti-austerity spokesperson’. His YouTube series *The Trews* (‘true news’) is presented as ‘news you can trust’ in opposition to mainstream news sources (Russell Brand, 2014a). Prior to New Era Brand had largely used the series to discuss topical issues and critique news construction and discourses, through a mocking satirical humour familiar from his stand-up shows (Brassett, 2016). In this case study I build on Arthurs and Shaw (2016) by using Seward’s (2010) theory to examine how Brand constructed claims to represent citizens, showing he continued to use the ‘familiar, emotional script’ of populist rhetoric as a resource (Grattan, 2012: 198).

Brand had also used *The Trews* to promote similar housing campaigns, devoting two episodes to the Focus E15 campaign’s occupation of the Carpenters estate in September 2014 (Russell Brand, 2014b; Russell Brand, 2014c). While grassroots campaigns complement Brand’s claims to represent ‘the people’ against ‘the establishment’ (Arthurs and Shaw, 2016), anti-austerity activism could be perceived as inconsistent with Brand’s economic and celebrity capital. This tension was demonstrated when Brand attended the Anonymous ‘million mask march’ in 2014. Brand removed his mask, thereby appearing to seek attention for himself at odds with the protest’s aims, and was labelled a

‘champagne socialist’ for attending a ‘celebrity party’ afterwards (Biggs, 2014). Brand’s wealth complicates his ability to make ‘mirroring claims’ - based on ‘descriptive similarity’ - to represent those struggling to afford housing in the same area of London he comfortably called home (Saward, 2010: 100). Arthurs and Little argue Brand addressed these tensions by downplaying his ‘celebrity brand’ (2016: 96), engaging in ‘acts of resistance’, and emphasising ‘continued affinity and shared values’ with campaigners to produce ‘an assemblage of protest rather than one of celebrity’. Building on this, I argue these tactics were important but as part of Brand’s negotiation of claims to represent residents in the face of contestation.

New Era 4 All was established when the New Era estate in Hoxton, a gentrifying area bordering the City of London, was sold to a private consortium that planned to renovate it and more than triple rents to market rate. Afraid they would be priced out of London resident Lindsey Garrett contacted the *Daily Mirror*, who highlighted the involvement of a property company managed by the brother of a Conservative MP (The Benyon Estate). Garrett and housing activist Barry Watt (2014) started a petition on Change.org and residents collected signatures at Hoxton market. It was here that Brand, who lived nearby, met them in September 2014.

Brand used social media and YouTube to share the petition and ask for support, with a second channel started by activist John Rogers to complement these efforts (*Trews Reports*, since rebranded *Drift Report*). Rogers interviewed residents about their ‘heartbreaking’ situation, with the campaign’s resident-leaders telling viewers they wanted ‘Edward Benyon and his associates to offer us long-term affordable rents’ or sell the estate to someone ‘with that ethos’ (Drift Report, 2014a). Brand’s promotion had a significant impact on petition signatures, which went from 1,000 to 300,000 within a month. During this month the campaign held their two protests, with Brand not simply attending these but playing a crucial role in promoting and remediating them. The

following section sets out the methods I use to assess how Brand attempted to ‘amplify’ the voices of New Era residents, both during these protests and as the political information cycles around them unfolded.

4.2 Methods and Data

I combine participant observation of the campaign’s two protests with thick description of content produced by and about Brand and New Era, using this primarily to reconstruct the political information cycle around the Westbrook protest. At the first protest against the Benyon Estate in Hoxton on November 8th 2014, I observed Brand and the campaign’s leaders throughout. My fieldnotes focused on how Brand interacted with residents, protestors and press, and how he and campaign leaders addressed the crowd. At the second protest against Westbrook Partners on December 1st 2014 I observed Brand and Lindsey Garrett addressing the crowd, but the larger scale of the protest and restrictions on who could enter Downing Street limited my access to key actors. Shifting my focus to protestors, I made fieldnotes about their chants and banners and spoke to groups and individuals about how they had heard about the protest, what motivated them to attend, and how they felt about Brand’s involvement. Attending both protests also enabled me to observe the increased interest from journalists, activist groups and citizens. Participant observation allows for a more detailed understanding of how Brand constructed his role in the campaign, and how those Brand claimed to speak for responded to him, than previous work.

I also took a more thorough approach to collecting social media, online news, newspaper and broadcast news content. This allows me to go beyond the description of key campaign moments given by Arthurs and Little (2016) to reconstruct the political information cycle around the Westbrook protest. Chadwick (2017: 73-5) defines political information cycles as ‘complex assemblages’ involving ‘greater numbers and a more diverse range of actors’, often including ‘non-elite participants’ (see section 3.6.1). While

I began following the case in October 2014, the data used to reconstruct this cycle was collected between December 1st (the day of the protest) and December 23rd 2014 (four days after the sale of the estate was announced). During this period I conducted what Chadwick terms ‘live ethnography’ (2017: 71): ‘close, real-time observation and logging of a wide range of newspaper, broadcast and online material, including citizen opinion expressed and coordinated through social network sites’.

I collected online coverage of the protest and related events through daily Google Alerts for all news and blog mentions of ‘Russell Brand’ or ‘New Era Estate’ from UK and international sources. These sources can be seen listed by publication date in Appendix A. I also collected references to Brand and New Era in national newspapers, and online videos of television news reports. All relevant pieces were catalogued chronologically using Evernote. I frequently refreshed the ‘front pages’ of news websites that featured the story, taking screenshots to track the prominence given to Brand and the campaign. Following the protest I collected tweets from journalists and MPs who had attended and Brand’s tweets and Facebook posts, activating Twitter alerts for these key actors so their ongoing interventions could be collected. I also set up alerts for Brand’s YouTube Channel and the *Trews Reports* Channel and checked Brand’s Facebook page several times a day, cataloguing relevant content in Evernote. To get a sense of how hashtags associated with the campaign were used, I also used a Twitter archiving tool to collect tweets in Google spreadsheets (Argawal, 2015).⁴

By reconstructing the political information cycle around the Westbrook protest through thick description of this data, I extend my analysis of how Brand performed claims to represent New Era based on participant observation and assess how other actors remediated and evaluated these claims. I also examine how Brand attempted to use his

⁴ I collected tweets including #NewEraEstate from 2/12/14 to 13/12/14 (17,000+ including retweets), and tweets including #TheSunLogic from 3/12/14 to 13/12/14 (10,000+ including retweets).

media resources to influence and intervene in the political information cycle, and the extent to which he was able to ‘amplify’ the voices of New Era residents. Having considered how previous campaigns have been declared a success but also deemed to be superficial celebrity ‘quick fixes’ (see section 2.5), I also ask who benefitted from Brand’s claims to represent New Era.

4.3 Analysis

4.3.1 ‘Maybe it’s because I’m a Londoner’: The Benyon Protest

My observations about how Brand constructed his relationship with New Era residents and his role in their campaign during the Benyon protest provide broader insight into how he performed representative claims. Brand demonstrated his belief that his celebrity capital and media experience were necessary to success, while acknowledging that his wealth and celebrity could lead to contestation of his claims. He therefore made visible efforts to negotiate his role in relation to these challenges.

Brand asked email subscribers and *Trews Reports* viewers to ‘join me in our first action’ against the Benyon Estate on November 8th (Russell Brand, 2014d), encouraging viewers to show support by tweeting #ProtestTheThreeScrooges (Edward Benyon, Richard Benyon, and Boris Johnson). Coverage of this protest estimated attendance at between 100 and 300, with my impression being that it was toward the lower end. This was very much a local protest. The march around the neighbourhood was attended mainly by residents and other locals, joined by members of the Socialist Worker’s Party and the Hare Krishna movement, with journalists representing local papers and blogs. The march took us from New Era to the offices of the Benyon Estate, where Brand and campaign leaders affixed a mock eviction notice to the company’s door. From here we walked round the corner to Edward Benyon’s house, where Brand scaled the scaffolding to hang a banner stating ‘social housing not social cleansing’. While this was an attention-grabbing

move Brand's perception of how he could best represent New Era was usually demonstrated through efforts to support rather than lead, acting as compère to resident Lindsay Garrett's keynote.

Addressing press and protestors before the march Brand made it clear he wanted to attract attention, but did not want to be the centre of it. Brand stated his intention to 'amplify' the campaign rather than lead it, telling us:

Some of us are like entertainers, amplifying and supporting, but this is 92 families are losing their homes because of greed. So all of us, especially me, I'm mostly talking to myself, keep our egos in check.

In practice, 'amplification' meant trying to ensure residents and their children marched at the front and were featured prominently in photographs. On the steps of the Benyon Estate offices Brand took the role of introducing Garrett so she could give a speech about the situation she and other residents faced, and read the 'eviction notice' outlining their demands.

Brand's aim to 'amplify' went beyond handing the megaphone over to residents, and acknowledging his limited ability to speak from their experience. As protestors gathered Brand asked whether we should remove the word 'fight' from chants, so as not to give a negative impression. This was ignored, but demonstrates the importance Brand attached to attracting positive coverage and belief that it was his role to use his experience to secure this. This was most evident when we stopped outside the Benyon Estate offices. Brand told the crowd we were affixing an 'eviction notice' here because the grand entrance afforded a better photo opportunity than Edward Benyon's house. Brand surrounded himself with women and children from New Era, telling those with cameras to 'fuck off' and attempting to push placards brought by members of the Socialist Workers Party out of shot. He spent several minutes attempting to construct his preferred

defining image of the march, visibly expending effort to secure the representation of the protest he believed would be most useful in media coverage.

Figure 4.1. Brand and campaigners at the Benyon Estate offices



Source: *The Guardian*

John Rogers' two minute *Trews Report*, uploaded later that day, focused on Garrett's address to and shots of the crowd, closing with children cheerfully chanting campaign slogans (Drift Report, 2014b). This attracted a high audience for this channel, having been viewed 33,000 times. Brand could not attract a higher audience simply by sharing the video on social media rather than publishing it on his own channel however, even if photos from the march received thousands of likes and shares.

While coverage was modest at this stage Brand's ability to attract media attention beyond local news was evident, with the march covered online by *Vice*, *Contactmusic* and *Buzzfeed*. Coverage from both *The Guardian* and *MailOnline* was highly shared and received hundreds of comments. Aditya Chakraborty (2014b) who had previously covered housing campaigns provided coverage befitting Brand's aim of 'amplification', focusing on telling Garrett's story. *Mail Online* in contrast noted Brand's wealth and that he 'boasts' homes in London and Los Angeles, mocking the 'champagne socialist' for deciding 'he was the right man to lead a protest against inflated house prices' (Awford,

2014). This gave an early indication of how coverage would become polarised, and Brand would struggle to control it, as the campaign began to attract the greater attention he sought.

On November 13th it was announced that the Benyon Estate would relinquish their ten per cent share in New Era. Rather than ending residents' fight this brought new urgency, as US company Westbrook Partners decided to accelerate the process of raising rents. Three days later residents appealed directly to *Trews Reports* viewers for support and petition signatures, seeking to put pressure on Westbrook and Boris Johnson (Drift Report, 2014c). As the Westbrook protest approached Brand used his own YouTube channel to promote it, attracting a higher audience (around 130,000 views). Here Brand showed footage from his interview with New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, discussing Westbrook's poor reputation as a housing provider (Russell Brand, 2014f). Though his access to de Blasio is a clear demonstration of his celebrity and social capital, Brand still devolved much of the task of mobilising viewers' support to residents themselves. Brand asked the campaign's resident-leaders whether they (and therefore in turn he) had the support of *all* residents, encouraging Danielle Molinari to reassure viewers 'it's not just us three...we've got complete backing from all of them'. Brand asked viewers to use Twitter to put pressure on Boris Johnson, before joining residents to 'send a message' to Westbrook ahead of their protest against them.

Observation of this protest and analysis of the political information cycle around it shows that Brand certainly accumulated celebrity capital through his involvement, also mobilising support for the campaign that supported his claims to represent it. His ability to exchange celebrity capital for political capital through these claims was complicated by his inability to simply 'amplify' the voices of New Era residents. As I now discuss Brand's claims could not pass without contestation from the media organisations with which Brand's relationship has long been combative. Most importantly however this

‘reading back’ on the grounds (largely) of wealth did not prevent Brand from exchanging his celebrity capital. As the political information cycle focused on whether Brand could claim to represent campaigners rather than on the campaign itself, Brand used overt acceptance from other journalists, citizens, and most importantly from New Era residents to make a case for his credibility.

4.3.2 18 Days in December: The Westbrook Protest

Protestors gathered outside Westbrook’s London office in Berkeley Square at 12.30 on December 1st, awaiting the arrival of New Era residents and Brand. It was immediately clear this protest would attract a larger crowd, with increased interest from journalists and politicians also adding a sense of momentum. *The Guardian* followed residents from preparations at home to the doorstep of Number 10 Downing Street, even running a liveblog (Phipps, 2014), with at least four Labour MPs and the Mayor of Hackney joining protestors. On her website, residents’ MP Meg Hillier (2014) claimed that she had encouraged residents to establish the residents’ association which now led their campaign. Brand did not acknowledge this support from politicians, continuing to construct claims in opposition to elected representatives by telling the crowd ‘these people are not being represented by anybody else’.

Brand and campaign leaders had successfully captured the attention of people beyond Hoxton by relating the campaign to broader issues. The protest became an opportunity for various anti-austerity groups to express anger, with representatives from the UK’s largest trade union Unite marching alongside a feminist group whose banner proclaimed ‘housing is a feminist issue’. Trade unionists spoke of the importance of making London affordable for public sector workers, while others came concerned about the future of their own housing estates hoping New Era could set a positive precedent.

Coaches bringing residents, Brand, and *Guardian* journalists arrived shortly after 1pm. Brand continued to perform the role of ‘amplifier’, ordering journalists and protestors to allow residents and their children to occupy the centre of the crowd. Brand introduced Garrett so she could be first to address us, imploring Westbrook to ‘leave London alone’ and for Boris Johnson to ‘help the people who voted you in’. We marched from Mayfair to Downing Street, with Brand again insistent that residents be seen at the front.

Conversations with and between protestors, as well as their banners and chants, gave interesting insight into their motivations. Protestors I spoke to attended because the campaign reflected broader concerns about housing, gentrification, austerity, capitalism, and the future of London. Londoners swapped stories of financial struggle and rising rents, with some also fearing the threat of property developers. Focus E15 was mentioned frequently, adding to a sense of momentum around housing activism people wanted to be part of. The march became an opportunity for expressing anti-government and anti-capitalist anger, with David Cameron, Boris Johnson, and George Osborne the main targets of derision. For the protestors I spoke to success for New Era was important, but not enough; chants of ‘What do we want?’ ‘Council houses’, became ‘What do we want?’ ‘Revolution!’

While most had become aware of the campaign through Brand’s Twitter or *The Trews*, discussion of him was positive but not unquestioningly. Even among regular viewers it was common to hear qualification of their enjoyment of *The Trews* and support for Brand, implying that protestors did not want to be perceived as motivated to take action *because of* Brand’s promotion or presence. This came in the form of comments that they were ‘not really fans’ of Brand before, but felt that he was putting his fame to ‘good use’. This supports Mendick et al.’s (2018: 147) argument that fame is generally viewed with distaste, but is legitimated if the celebrity is seen to use it to ‘benefit others’.

In spite of these efforts to create a comfortable distance from celebrity, these statements demonstrate acceptance Brand was acting in the interests of New Era. A student who had come with friends started an interesting discussion when he said he liked *The Trews* but didn't like the name, with others agreeing that while they generally shared his opinions Brand should not label these 'true news'. There was however a strong sense of loyalty to Brand against his media critics, with those I spoke to sharing Brand's distrust of mainstream media sources and seeing him as representing part of an alternative. As one protester put it, 'he's doing good work, but the media are trying to make him out to be a twat'. This also suggests Brand's construction of claims in opposition to political and media elites is appealing to their intended constituency.

The hashtag Brand had encouraged *Trews* viewers to use (#NewEraEstate) became a way for journalists and protestors to mediate the march, and was used by others to express encouragement from a distance during the protest and beyond. Brand shared pictures of himself, campaign leaders and their children handing in their petition with almost 300,000 signatures to Number 10. Emerging from Downing Street to re-join the crowd, Brand praised residents for 'demonstrating that by coming together you can make a difference, you do have power yourselves you don't need to look to other people for political power'. As the crowd dispersed I felt the demonstration had gone well and left to begin capturing media responses. It was only then I discovered something had happened on Downing Street that would dominate the political information cycle around the protest for the next eighteen days, undermining Brand's claims to 'amplify' New Era.

4.3.3 'Snidegate': A Question of Hypocrisy

After the petition had been handed in and selfies taken on the Prime Minister's doorstep, Brand was interviewed by *Channel 4 News* reporter Paraic O'Brien. At 2.29pm, O'Brien tweeted that he liked Brand but he's 'not so keen on me' (paraicobrien, 2014a). At this point the interview was available on the *Channel 4 News* YouTube channel, but was not

mentioned in the first stories about the protest from *The Guardian*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Independent* and *Russia Today*. There was no negative coverage before part of the interview, which became known as ‘Snidegate’, was shown on *Channel 4 News* that evening. A heated exchange about Brand’s rent then became the centre of the political information cycle around rent rises at New Era.

The full interview on YouTube begins with O’Brien asking Brand what it means ‘personally’ to be involved (Channel 4 News, 2014a). Brand used his working-class background as a resource to make a ‘mirroring claim’ based on shared experience with New Era residents (Saward, 2010: 100). He told O’Brien their situation reminded him of ‘my own childhood, the sense of lack of power that you can have if you feel that there’s no one out there representing you’ (Channel 4 News, 2014a). By implying again that nobody else was representing New Era, Brand justifies the use of his celebrity capital to speak for the residents he no longer resembles so closely.

O’Brien immediately contests this, suggesting Brand is ‘part of the problem’ of the ‘super-rich buying property in London’ and asking how much he paid for his home. A squabble ensued as Brand attempted to change the subject, swiftly responding ‘it’s rented’ as O’Brien pushed him to reveal what ‘kind of rent’ he was paying. Brand reiterated his own representative claim through a challenge to O’Brien, appealing to the journalist that ‘as a member of the media’ he was neglecting his ‘important duty to help to represent these people, not to reframe the argument’. Re-making his claim to bring ‘wider interests and new voices’ to public attention (Saward, 2010: 99), Brand argues he is ‘part of the solution, people coming together to amplify the voices of ordinary people’.

During this argument Garrett could be heard off-camera defending Brand, saying ‘at least Russell’s prepared to help people, David Cameron isn’t’. Brand grabbed her by her jacket, pulling her in front of the camera. Garrett disputed O’Brien’s argument that

Brand's wealth matters, arguing 'at least Russell Brand's standing up, regardless of how big his house is, in coming down and helping ordinary people'. She attributed the scale of the campaign to Brand, continuing 'thank God there is people like him...otherwise we wouldn't be here today, we wouldn't have 300,000 signatures'. In coming to Brand's defence Garrett provided an overt 'acceptance event' for Brand's claims to represent her and her neighbours (Saward, 2010: 152), legitimising Brand's claims in the face of contestation. Unable to contain his aggravation in spite of this, Brand stormed off after retorting to O'Brien; 'snides like you mate undermine it, you're a snide'.

The *Channel 4 News* (2014b) report at 7pm gave viewers the background story of New Era, including interviews with Garrett and the Mayor of Hackney. The interview was edited to begin with O'Brien confronting Brand about the cost of his home, and end shortly after Brand dragged Garrett in front of the camera. Brand's 'snide' jibe was therefore cut, but so was the majority of Garrett's defence of Brand's claims to represent her. That the interview became known as 'Snidegate', with the full interview viewed on YouTube over 2.2 million times, suggests that it was the unedited but decontextualised version that most influenced subsequent coverage.

The first comments on *The Guardian* liveblog, posted before marchers left Berkeley Square, dismissed Brand as a 'champagne socialist' (Phipps, 2014). Following 'Snidegate' Brand's wealth moved from below the line to the core of the political information cycle. As coverage became focused on whether Brand or O'Brien was in the right, O'Brien responded to criticism of his line of questioning on Twitter only two hours after the broadcast. He argued that while he did not believe rich people are not entitled to care, it is his job to 'test tension between private circumstances & publicly held views of celebrities' (paraicobrien, 2014a; paraicobrien, 2014b; paraicobrien, 2014c). The following morning O'Brien tweeted, 'Holy God. Reading my timeline from overnight. Looks like come the revolution, we 'snides' are totally f*#ked :)' (paraicobrien, 2014d).

Replies to these tweets show that criticism continued for several days, as O'Brien's two-minute interview continued to dominate campaign coverage.

The 38 stories published online on December 2nd illustrate that Brand did not underestimate his celebrity capital, and counter to Thrall et al.'s (2008) argument was able to attract attention from mainstream news sites and entertainment sources. The protest to save an East London housing estate received attention not just from local and national sources, but sites based in Ireland, the USA, Canada and Australia. In attempting to construct coverage that would 'amplify' New Era, Brand sought to exert influence beyond his control. Only *Hackney Gazette* focused coverage on the protest itself (Bartholomew, 2014a). 37 headlines referred to 'Snidegate' and the challenge over Brand's rent, the majority embedding the incriminating interview.

When *Channel 4* tweeted this interview Twitter user @aeon456 (2014) replied 'His own rent is top secret - bet the Daily Mail will find out though'. At 10.34 the following morning *MailOnline* published 'Millionaire comedian and former Mr Katy Perry, Russell Brand pays thousands a month to his tax-exile landlords despite campaigning against rocketing rent prices' (Sears et. al., 2014). This used 'Snidegate' to publish allegations that Brand's landlord did not pay tax, alongside the alleged cost of Brand's current and former homes. The re-use of multiple old *Daily Mail* stories in this piece demonstrates the difficulty of attracting positive attention from sources that have previously (and repeatedly) published negative stories. This has been shared 8,900 times, and received 5,900 comments. Whilst even gossip sites noted the context of the interview, to varying extents, it is undeniable that the story of New Era and the housing crisis had been overshadowed by Brand's two-minute argument with a journalist.

4.3.4 *'I shouldn't be allowed on Television': Re-making and Re-claiming*

Brand made several interventions through YouTube and social media to counter criticism, re-make representative claims, and attempt to reclaim the political information cycle. On December 2nd Brand used his daily *Trews* episode to deconstruct the interview (Russell Brand, 2014g). While arguing that he understands how media works from '10 years of experience' Brand expressed frustration with O'Brien and embarrassment over his own response, joking he is a 'volatile' person who 'shouldn't be allowed on television'. *The Trews* also afforded Brand a platform to re-make claims to represent New Era by drawing parallels between his life, pre-fame, and the lives of residents. Brand continued his 'mirroring claim', curtailed during the *Channel 4* interview, by claiming to understand the 'unsettling and unnerving feeling' residents felt as his mum had reminded him of bailiffs visiting his childhood home. By claiming to care on a 'personal level cos that estate's down the road from where I live, and I hang out there all the time', Brand attempted to demonstrate 'genuine' commitment to the cause beyond what could be seen on camera (Inthorn and Street, 2011).

Brand continued however to negotiate the limits to his descriptive similarity to residents, arguing he was 'not claiming to know all the answers' and joking that Garrett is 'much better qualified' to defend him from contestation than he is (Russell Brand, 2014f). Brand described helping residents as something he could do 'now I've got the mic, now I've got this voice', grounding his claims to speak for others in the celebrity capital which enables him to represent the campaign to broader audiences. Brand's claim was again based on voicing an argument and giving voice to people that would otherwise go unheard (Saward, 2010: 95), positioning the campaign in opposition to 'government, media, ineffectual local councils and apathetic politicians'.

Brand clearly intended to shift attention back onto the campaign he sought to amplify. While this *Trews* episode was viewed 430,000 times, a *Trews Report* uploaded

the same day actually showing residents sharing their experiences of the protest was only viewed 14,400 times (Drift Report, 2014d). While affording Brand an opportunity to re-make his claims to represent residents, his interventions in the political information cycle could not reclaim it. This *Trews* episode prompted new headlines and was incorporated into updated versions of several articles, but these focused on Brand's admission of being a 'volatile person' in the context of 'Snidegate'. In spite of the large audience for his efforts, events the following morning destroyed any chance Brand had of convincing people to talk about any Hoxton address other than his own.

4.3.5 Claims and Counter-Claims: *The Sun* Intervenes

At 11.40pm on December 2nd Brand tweeted 'Hey @TheSunNewspaper, @rupertmurdoch I'm gonna sue you and give the money to #NewEraEstate and JFT96' (rustyrocks, 2014a). This threat, retweeted over 16,000 times, was a reaction to *The Sun*'s front page on December 3rd (shown in Figure 4.2 below).

Figure 4.2. *The Sun* front page 03.12.2014



The Sun's position on the argument over Brand's wealth is clear, as they 'brand' him a 'HYPOCRITE' (White, 2014a). As with *MailOnline*'s coverage, alleged

complicity in tax avoidance was not the only issue; Brand's economic capital is perceived as inherently at odds with his left-wing politics and, more specifically, his claim to represent New Era. 'Snidegate' is given as justification for *The Sun's* 'probe' to 'prove' Brand's hypocrisy - an accusation supported by a quote from a Conservative MP - finding that Brand's landlord is 'based in the British Virgin Islands, where there are virtually no tax laws' (White, 2014a). Like *MailOnline*, *The Sun* used previous negative stories about Brand to add further evidence that he is a 'champagne socialist'. Seemingly unrelated stories such as 'Sachsgate' are used to undermine Brand's political credibility, while Brand's attendance at a 'showbiz bash' following the Million Mask March in 2013 is used to argue his fame undermines 'anti-capitalist protest'. The story continued on Page 5 under the headline 'WHAT A JOKE. Millionaire comic preaches revolution from posh pad' (White, 2014b). While Brand's wealth was therefore the main source of contestation, his career in the field of entertainment was also positioned in opposition to being taken seriously.

The Sun's intervention to 'brand' Brand a hypocrite now became the focus of the political information cycle, as Brand Vs. O'Brien became Brand Vs. *The Sun*. Criticism of the paper was expressed through a hashtag, #TheSunLogic, a backlash to a backlash started by left-wing commentator and *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones. At 08.46 on December 3rd Jones tweeted, 'Stop talking about combatting starvation – you have a fridge full of food! Hypocrite! #TheSunLogic' (OwenJones84, 2014). This was retweeted 1,568 times, but more significantly provided a focal point for contesting *The Sun's* criticism of Brand.

Over the next ten days #TheSunLogic was mentioned in 10,253 tweets and retweets. Other examples included, 'You're a medical doctor operating to remove a tumour? But you've never even had cancer yourself! #Hypocrite #TheSunLogic' (@Context_, 2014). This use of Twitter to contest stories by Conservative-supporting

papers was nothing new. During the 2010 General Election #NickCleggsFault was used in similarly satirical style to counter tabloid attacks on Clegg following the UK's first televised leaders' debate (Wring and Ward, 2010). Brand himself joined in, tweeting "In other news Robin Hood's tights were quite expensive" by Matt Morgan #TheSunLogic' (rustyrocks, 2014b). This continued for several days as argument over Brand's 'hypocrisy' continued, the hashtag also enduring due to its applicability to other examples of perceived warped logic in *Sun* stories. Having been used to challenge the argument that someone cannot help others if they have not experienced an identical situation it was also used, for example, to mock a piece comparing breastfeeding in public to public urination. #TheSunLogic therefore became a means of expressing broader ideological opposition to the paper, and a key part of the political information cycle around New Era. This benefitted Brand, as the tacit acceptance suggested by this public defence of his representative claims became an important part of his efforts to re-make them.

Brand used #TheSunLogic as a symbolic proxy for public support as the political information cycle became focused on who, he or *The Sun*, could claim to represent 'ordinary people'. On December 3rd Brand again used *The Trews* to intervene. In an episode titled 'Who Are The Real Hypocrites? #TheSunLogic', Brand mocked *The Sun* and reassured viewers he paid rent to an estate agent registered in the UK (Russell Brand, 2014h). Brand used #TheSunLogic to argue he 'had a bit of support on the issue from people like Owen Jones', showing and reading four tweets to demonstrate this 'support'. Brand challenged accusations of hypocrisy by arguing that his support for New Era was consistent with his broader political work. Referencing allegations that *Sun* owner Rupert Murdoch has used legal tax avoidance schemes, Brand argued we live in an 'aquarium of hypocrisy' and systemic change is required. 'Has anyone lately in the public eye', Brand asks his audience jokingly, 'been saying that the whole system needs to change? I don't know!' Once again Brand attempted to bring attention back to the 'real issue...the

campaign of the New Era estate to confront *their* corrupt landlords'. He reflected on the difficulty of 'amplifying the campaign' when 'they want to control the narrative so that no one with a voice can ever speak out about these issues'. With over 685,000 views, this remains one of Brand's most popular YouTube videos.

Argument between Brand and *The Sun* now dominated the political information cycle sparked by the Westbrook protest. Over the 3rd and 4th of December 59 new stories were published online, reaching again beyond UK news sources, with many taking sides. *MailOnline*'s criticism of Brand intensified with a scathing piece by Piers Morgan (2014), arguing that 'of all famous hypocrites, it's hypocritical comedians who can often provoke the most intense irritation'. Morgan accused Brand, a 'revolting hypocrite', of paying a 'vast sum to the very same type of shameless, rich, greedy, tax-avoiding firm that he wants us all to hate'. This piece has been shared 5,900 times and received over 1,800 comments. Comments were driven by strong negative reactions to both author and subject, further demonstrating that for Brand controversy brings celebrity capital. Overt support came in contrast in a piece by *The Independent*'s former editor Simon Kelner titled 'Give Russell Brand a break – he's no more a hypocrite than anyone else'. Kelner (2014) deconstructs the argument that Brand's wealth prevents him from supporting New Era, arguing 'in the end, he's succeeded in getting more people – including the Prime Minister – to recognise the issues'. It is therefore Brand's ability to represent the campaign to broader audience, his celebrity capital and media resources, that is seen to justify his involvement.

Figure 4.2 *Huffington Post* UK website top story 02.12.2014



The most significant response in terms of its scale and support came from *Huffington Post* UK. They made Brand their top story on the morning of December 3rd, leading with his threat to sue *The Sun* (see Figure 4.3 above). It is clear from the sub-headings they also used Brand's argument with *The Sun* to criticise the latter. Clicking on the headline 'See you in court, my Sun' took you to a story titled 'The Sun's Russell Brand "Hypocrite" Front Page Is Confusing' (Elgot, 2014). This article, which has been shared 4,700 times, used #TheSunLogic tweets to argue that 'much of the online chatter on the piece took the view that the piece was a cheap shot, whatever your opinion of Brand'.

This statement that your opinion of Brand personally was not relevant to argument over his right to represent New Era was indicative of a broader theme in coverage. #TheSunLogic tweets were frequently used to criticise *The Sun*, allowing rival news organisations to side with Brand without expressing overt acceptance of the comedian himself. This is reminiscent of the comfortable distance some protestors sought from

Brand, even as they followed him on social media and through the streets of London. Through #TheSunLogic journalists lent tacit support by contesting Brand's critics, but framed this as 'the public's' defence of Brand rather than their own. For example *Huffington Post* embedded 21 #TheSunLogic tweets in a piece titled 'Twitter Mocks Sun's Russell Brand "Hypocrite" Attack With Hilarious #TheSunLogic Hashtag' (Barrell, 2014). Journalists used tweets as a proxy for public opinion, as 'evidence' that *The Sun* was wrong to call Brand a 'hypocrite' based on his wealth. While Brand was unable to use social media to control the political information cycle, therefore, these platforms played a key role in enabling him and others to claim that the 'public' accepted his intervention.

Figure 4.3 above shows that *Huffington Post's* coverage included information about the campaign and images from the protest, reminding readers that '93 families could be thrown out before xmas'. While Brand remained a prominent feature on their front page for days to come, only local news organisations focused on New Era rather than arguments over Brand's role in their campaign. *East London Lines* was only organisation to report the campaign's own response to *The Sun's* allegations (Benge, 2014), referencing a 'New Era 4 All' Facebook post defending Brand as a 'kind and caring person'. While residents could consistently be seen supporting Brand on his social media platforms, the 'Snidegate' contestation paradoxically afforded Brand a broader opportunity to demonstrate overt acceptance from the constituency he claimed to speak for.

While his efforts to reclaim the political information cycle were unsuccessful, Brand's continued use of *The Trews* to attempt this provide further evidence of how he constructed representative claims. On December 4th Brand posted a 'comments edition' responding to viewers, using comments on his videos as further evidence he could claim acceptance (Russell Brand, 2014i). Brand emphasised what he was *not* doing as much as

what he was, telling viewers: ‘Lindsey or other Lynsay or Danielle they’re like the New Era folk. All I’m doing is standing there getting the camera to come, that’s all I’m doing’. Brand’s claim is also based on an argument others are not fulfilling their representative duties. Claiming ‘the media are interested in amplifying the message of people who already have power, politicians are interested in empty rhetoric’, Brand argued ‘we’ve gotta be interested in the different thing, representing one another in whatever way we can, accepting that we’re not perfect’. Here Brand positioned himself among those he is addressing, a group capable of ‘representing one another’, while using his ability to ‘get the camera to come’ to justify his elevated position within this group. Brand used markers of class to further support these claims, joking in response to accusations he is an elite ‘shill’ that ‘I’m from Grays, my mum’s called Babs, my dad’s called Ron!’ Acknowledging his steep trajectory since leaving Grays, Brand again framed his fame as a resource to ‘amplify’ the voices of ordinary people rather than claiming to share this voice.

Only three days after the march to Downing Street, the New Era story had become a battle between Brand and *The Sun* that the latter appeared to be losing. If Brand and *The Huffington Post* could use ‘public opinion’ to support their argument, however, so could they.

4.3.6 Who Speaks for the #People and the Percentage Points?

On December 5th *The Sun* came to their own defence by making Russell Brand front-page news once again (see Figure 4.4 below). Quick to respond, Brand tweeted an image of this front page adding ‘Phwoar! @TheSunNewspaper where d’ya get this stat? Liverpool? Hacking into dead children’s phones?’ (rustyroockets, 2014c). These ‘stats’ were the results of a *Sun*-commissioned YouGov poll, and took pride of place alongside the headline ‘BRAND. THE NATION SPEAKS’ (Morgan, T., 2014).

Figure 4.3. *The Sun* front page 05.12.14



‘The nation’, according to *The Sun*, had ‘backed’ them by 68% for ‘branding bobby Russell Brand a hypocrite’ while 64% agreed with them that he’s ‘not funny’. On Page 5 *The Sun* concluded that ‘Britain’ had ‘seen through Brand’, captioning a picture of his face ‘Russell Sprout...the vegetable no one likes’ (Morgan and White, 2014). In the main text it is revealed that whilst 68% of respondents agreed Brand is ‘a hypocrite’, only 43% agreed that he has ‘double standards’. Brand’s inability to move past his history with the publications he sought support or New Era from is clear, with the poll asking whether it was hypocritical of him to attack the paper he once accepted a ‘shagger of the year award’ from. On page 6 *The Sun Says* (2014) column concluded unequivocally: ‘FORGIVE us for giggling, but it seems self-styled man of the people has been rejected – by the people’.

This antagonism is not surprising, with Brand (2013) having previously successfully sued *The Sun* and called Rupert Murdoch ‘an animatronic al-Qaida recruitment poster’. What is more significant is that this dispute was, at its core, an

argument over who could claim to represent ‘the people’. Both Brand and *The Sun* used proxies for public opinion – supportive tweets and opinion poll results - to support their argument that their opponent could *not* claim support. As well as #TheSunLogic tweets, other journalists used social media metrics to support arguments over who could claim to represent a larger audience and therefore possess greater ‘influence’. Comparing Brand with *The Sun*, *The Guardian* argued that ‘in many ways the comedian is now much more influential than the paper’ (Arnett, 2014). That Brand boasted 13 times more Twitter followers than *The Sun* was used as evidence of ‘just how far we have come from traditional newspapers such as *The Sun* controlling the debate’. Though *The Sun* had in fact played a key role in preventing Brand from controlling *this* debate, this demonstrates how Brand’s social media platforms were necessary resources in the process of claim-making and exchange. That Brand was *assumed* to have the support of his social media followers led journalists to *lend support* to his claims to represent others. This enabled Brand to use ‘public support’ to defend himself from ‘reading back’, reinforcing the idea that his celebrity capital could have political value.

While international and entertainment coverage decreased by December 5th UK news sites still had plenty to say. *Huffington Post* UK continued to place Brand high on their agenda, claiming that ‘others’ viewed *The Sun*’s attack as ‘petty and desperate’ (Ridley, 2014a). *The Guardian* returned to covering New Era explicitly, though this was to express disappointment only four days after the protest that ‘even with Russell Brand in the vanguard, the barricades remain unstormed’ (Jack, 2014). The foregrounded connection between Brand’s class background and those he claimed to speak for did not go unnoticed. Janet Street-Porter (2014) called Brand a ‘great advertisement for social mobility’ and accepted his continued ability to ‘fight for those at the bottom’. Phillips (2014) argued - also in *The Daily Mirror* -that Brand’s ‘turbulent upbringing’ would be ‘forever ingrained in his make up’, making it ‘ludicrous’ to suggest his ‘good income’

prevented ‘empathy’. On the whole however defence of Brand rested on the assumption his large audience afforded him the ability to ‘give voice’ to others in the political field. ‘When Russell Brand speaks’, Street-Porter (2014) concluded, ‘thousands of people listen’. This defence of Brand’s presence in the political field also operates on the assumption that Brand can ‘connect with the electorate’ in ways political leaders cannot.

Brand continued to defend himself in opposition to *The Sun*, drawing as he had previously on the populist language of ‘us versus them’ to position himself among the ‘ordinary people’ he spoke about (Arthurs and Shaw, 2016). At 10.27am on December 5th he tweeted, ‘The editor of @TheSunNewspaper is a privately educated Tory, the dep editor too. That’s why no interest in #NewEraEstate’ (rustyroockets, 2014d). In one of his most popular *Trews* episodes (almost 760,000 views), Brand used *The Sun*’s refusal to support New Era to argue *The Sun* claim to represent ‘ordinary working people’ but are actually the paper of ‘crushing’ them (Russell Brand, 2014j). Brand asks viewers to imagine how *he or they* would be treated if they avoided tax like Murdoch, arguing that ‘*our governments*’ should protect ‘ordinary working people from these giant corporations’ which lobby for laws that ‘shaft *us* and protect *them*’. As always Brand argued for the refocusing of coverage around New Era, arguing *The Sun* ‘know if they attack me the issue doesn’t get discussed’. As interest in New Era waned in the following days, attacks on Brand proved the most effective means of keeping him in the headlines.

4.3.7 December 6th-11th: Lose Temper, Gain Capital

Over the weekend following Monday’s protest (December 6th-7th) the political information cycle around it was winding down with only 10 new stories published online. The story was absent from weekend newspapers and Sunday morning political television in the UK even though Brand was not. On BBC1’s *Sunday Politics* Brand was mentioned in an interview with Conservative MP Sam Gyimah, with Gyimah and host Andrew Neil expressing concern that Brand’s comments about voting could have a ‘negative influence’

on young people. There was no mention of Brand's present, highly publicised efforts to mobilise support for a housing campaign. This supports Arthurs and Little's argument that not voting had become 'central to the political identity of his brand' in a way which was 'hard to shake-off' (2016: 104).

Just as coverage of New Era was framed around conflict, conflict brought attention back to Brand and - to a far lesser degree - the campaign. A week after the Westbrook protest (December 8th) Brand tweeted a picture of a *Daily Mail* journalist's business card, adding 'Lord Rothermere and @DailyMailUK avoid tax. One of their senior reporters wants to talk about it'. This was swiftly deleted as Brand received criticism for publishing the journalists' phone number. A *Huffington Post* journalist who had previously defended Brand described this as a 'horrible thing for @rustyroockets to do'. Brand tweeted an apology: 'That was a bit nuts. He put it thru me door with "please call" on it. They're bothering me Mum. Deleted it. I'm human' (rustyroockets, 2014e). This now became the focus of the political information cycle, with tweets again used as evidence but not to Brand's advantage. *Huffington Post* were quick to report Brand's tweet and apology (York, 2014a), making the possibility he could be banned from Twitter for breaching privacy rules their top story that afternoon.

Figure 4.4. *Huffington Post* UK top story 08.12.2014



Having featured him on the front page of their website almost constantly for a week, *Huffington Post* UK now used tweets to suggest an ‘immediate backlash’ against Brand. With their previous support routed indirectly through #TheSunLogic tweets, conflict between ‘polarising’ Brand and the ‘polarising’ *Daily Mail* was described as an ‘epic moral dilemma’ played out through ‘pro-Mail’ and ‘pro-Brand’ tweets (Ridley, 2014b). While this complicated Brand’s claim to public support by proxy, the potential for Brand to be ‘banned’ from Twitter revived interest in the question of whether he spoke for ‘the public’.

Between the 8th and the 10th of December 32 original stories were published online across UK news sites, and sites based in Ireland, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, India and Malta. All but one focused on Brand’s tweet and the possibility of a ‘Twitter ban’, using tweets as evidence that ‘public opinion’ was turning against him. While articles frequently mentioned ‘Snidegate’ and *The Sun*’s accusations of hypocrisy, the protest which sparked these arguments had become lost in the drama.

4.3.8 A Question of Cold Paella: Brand's Attention Divided

Though Brand's 'Twitter ban' never materialised, events over the next few days further demonstrated the difficulty of using celebrity capital to support single-issue campaigns. Brand continued to demonstrate his ability to rapidly accumulate media representations but could not keep these focused on New Era, and nor could he sustain his media presence while keeping his own attention fixed on the campaign. On December 11th, ten days after the protest, Brand appeared on BBC *Question Time* alongside then UKIP leader Nigel Farage. This attracted a huge amount of attention from journalists (around 125 pieces published between the 12th and 14th) and on social media, bringing new controversies to be contested and reinforced. The political information cycle around New Era could be seen to influence events on *Question Time*, as Farage challenged Brand over his wealth and an audience member accused Brand of hypocrisy for not putting himself forward for election. However as Brand continued to attract headlines over the following days New Era was rarely mentioned.

Even *Huffington Post* UK - with their full webpage dedicated to Brand - were no longer talking about New Era. As coverage of *Question Time* continued, making Brand *Huffington Post's* top story once again, on the evening of December 15th Brand's documentary *End the Drugs War* was shown on BBC Three. Two days later Brand's antics while filming for another documentary attracted yet more headlines. As he attempted to enter the Royal Bank of Scotland's headquarters to protest bankers' bonuses security put the building on lockdown. One employee, frustrated that his paella went cold while he waited outside, wrote an open letter expressing his annoyance at 'hypocrite' Brand. The celebrity capital these events afforded Brand did not translate to attention for New Era, only extending the political information cycle by feeding into debate over whether Brand was a hypocrite. Tweets continued to be used to speculate over how each new event affected Brand's popularity. *The Independent* for example described *End The*

Drugs War as a ‘social media turn-around’ (Selby, 2014c). This described Brand as a ‘social housing campaigner’ and repeated the ‘hypocrite’ claim, but the protest that provoked it was absent. The only direct mention of the campaign came in another *Independent* piece arguing that Brand should vote for the Green Party (Williams, 2014).

New Era had not only almost disappeared from media coverage but also from Brand’s online presence, as he focused attention on and responded to these unrelated stories. His last significant attempt to share his platform with residents came on December 10th, with a *Trews Report* titled ‘A week at the New Era Estate Hoxton’ (Drift Report, 2014e). This followed residents in their daily lives, discussing how journalists from *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* had been trying to ‘pull some dirt’ on them. It shows Brand socialising with the campaign’s leaders and their children at a Christmas festival, demonstrating again his personal commitment to but also their overt acceptance of his involvement in their campaign. In spite of Brand sharing this it was only viewed 21,000 times, continuing the trend that only content on his own channel could reach far larger audiences. At this point, with Brand attracting attention but little of it noting New Era, it was difficult to see the campaign becoming a prominent news story again.

4.3.9 A New Deal for New Era

At 6.22pm on December 18th *Guardian* journalist Robert Booth (2014a), who covered the march to Downing Street, claimed Westbrook were on the verge of selling New Era ‘to an affordable housing provider’. This noted the ‘support of comedian and inequality campaigner Russell Brand’ without arguments over his right to be involved, and has been shared almost 12,000 times and received 900 comments. *New York Times* attributed the deal to New Era going from ‘a slam-dunk real estate deal to a public relations nightmare virtually overnight’ (Anderson, 2014). At 3.43pm Robert Booth (2014b) confirmed the sale to Dolphin Living, an affordable housing company who committed to ‘develop a rent policy that is demonstrably fair’. Booth described this as a ‘huge result for grass roots

campaign and @rustyrocks' (Robert_Booth, 2014). His piece, which has been shared nearly 17,500 times and received over 600 comments, praises residents for fighting 'a powerful campaign' and winning the support of Brand who 'highlighted their cause'. Booth makes it clear however that formal political representatives were also key to success, noting Hackney Mayor Jules Pipe and London Deputy Mayor for Housing Richard Blakeway had negotiated with Westbrook. Brand continued to demonstrate his personal involvement by tweeting photos of residents celebrating, promising an 'Exciting Trews later on the New Era estate with the families that stood up to corporation and government and won' (rustyrocks, 2014f).

In this episode (Russell Brand, 2014k), which has been viewed 184,000 times, Brand joined the three women who led the campaign to share their success story. Brand celebrates this demonstration of 'people power', highlighting other housing campaigns and encouraging viewers to come together 'to overthrow apathetic governments and corrupt corporations'. Looking back on their campaign, they joke about Brand's 'barney' with O'Brien on Downing Street following the Westbrook protest. Arthurs and Little (2016: 97) highlight this as an example of Brand demonstrating not just 'reciprocated affection', but also a 'shared class habitus' and 'common culture' with residents. We have seen that Brand foregrounded his working-class background to support claims in the face of contestation. I argue that the affection for Brand shown by residents in this video and elsewhere was most significant in providing 'acceptance events': overt demonstrations of campaigners' acceptance of Brand's claims to represent them (Saward, 2010: 152). Reflecting on their campaign they advise others to 'get a celebrity' to help, but to 'get a celebrity like Russ' that 'actually cares about people' and is not 'in it for themselves' (Russell Brand, 2014k).

Having defended Brand on Downing Street, Lindsay Garrett (2014) again expressed overt acceptance in a piece for *The Independent*. She reflected she didn't 'think

we'd be here now without Russell Brand's support', emphasising his ability to bring 'publicity' and give New Era a 'bigger voice'. Brand's efforts to 'amplify' rather than lead the campaign were clearly appreciated even if he failed to control the agenda, as Garrett argued that 'rather than taking over, he gave us a much bigger audience to speak to'. Garrett credited 'the full support of Russell Brand' again when *Channel 4 News* (2014d) reported the sale in their evening broadcast on the 20th, telling economics editor Paul Mason that 'without that man's help we would not be in the position we're in today'. The sale was also reported on *BBC London News* (BBC News, 2014) with claims Brand helped turn New Era into 'a national treasure that needs to be saved'.

Figure 4.5. *Huffington Post* Top Story 19.12.2014



At around 7pm on the 19th the *Huffington Post* made Brand their top story again, this time with equal billing for New Era, framing the sale as the 'first real victory' for Brand's 'revolution' (York, 2014b). Between December 19th and 23rd 31 stories were published online. New Era residents now found themselves back in the picture alongside Brand rather than obscured by him. Garrett was quoted in the majority of post-sale articles, and the personal stories of residents was integral to reporting their success.

So however was the framing of the sale as victory and vindication for Brand, a final piece of confirmatory evidence against his critics. On the *Guardian* website, Antony

Loewenstein (2014) argued, ‘After New Era, it’s harder than ever to mock Russell Brand as a hypocrite’. The piece has been shared 14,500 times and received over 600 comments, where debate over Brand’s alleged hypocrisy continued. *The Independent* reported the sale on the front page of their website as ‘Proof that Russell Brand's revolution may actually be working’ (Selby, 2014b). On Facebook this piece, touted as Brand’s ‘first big campaign win’, received nearly 54,000 likes, 8,500 shares, and 2,200 comments. *Metro* suggested that the sale was ‘something of a vindication for Brand’ (Readhead, 2014), and that those ‘who called him “vacuous” and “misguided” may soon have to add “effective” to that list’. The paper that had called Brand vacuous - *The Sun* - was in no hurry to do this, and neither they nor the *Daily Mail* reported the sale.

As the political information cycle shifted local news continued to focus most on residents, providing the most details on the sale including the role of politicians in negotiating it. Elsewhere, statements by Meg Hillier MP, Hackney Council, and Jules Pipe were ignored. An *Independent* piece noted that ‘Boris Johnson and Hackney Mayor Jules Pipe had also urged Westbrook to rethink, and it is understood that Mr Pipe with Mr Johnson’s deputy Richard Blakeway helped negotiate the sale’ (Lusher, 2014), but otherwise only *Guardian* coverage paid attention to the role of politicians. Brand, in contrast, continued to present the sale as an ‘incredible victory against greedy corporations and lazy politicians’ (Russell Brand, 2014l). This came as part of a long, emotional Facebook post where Brand continued to use class-based familiarity to claim an understanding of constituents, describing the ‘eerily resonant pang’ he felt as he became part of their community.

Whilst coverage of the sale ended after December 23rd, the New Era story continued through broader coverage contesting the housing crisis. Owen Jones (2014) declared 2014 ‘the year the grassroots took on the powerful – and won’, claiming social media enabled campaigns ‘ignored or demonised by newspapers’ to get their message

across. Brand, criticised at times but certainly not ignored, had successfully made claims to represent the interests of others in the political field and exchange his celebrity capital for political capital.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 'A Representative of the People, Rejected by the People'?

Brand made repeated efforts to justify his presence in a campaign to save families from eviction in the gentrifying area of London he then comfortably called home, from before the first gathering of protestors until after the sale of the estate was announced. Brand's intervention in the political field was made not simply through protests and platforms, but through the construction and re-construction of claims to represent New Era residents and an audience of citizens he aimed to mobilise. In doing so, Brand used his celebrity capital and media resources to compete for political recognition on the basis of his acceptance as a representative by others.

Lacking the institutional 'background factors' which provide strongest support for representative claims Brand placed strong emphasis on 'spoken and presented foreground factors' (Saward, 2010: 73). Brand constructed claims in two key ways. He foregrounded a class-based 'descriptive' similarity to residents, using stories from childhood to draw direct parallels between his lived experience and theirs, to make a 'mirroring claim' to understand their interests (Saward, 2010: 100). However Brand also repeatedly negotiated the limits to his ability to 'mirror' constituents due to his economic and celebrity capital, making no attempt to obscure his sharp upward trajectory (Bourdieu, 1987). He therefore constructed his role as being to 'amplify' the voices of New Era residents, turning the capital that distanced him from the group into a resource that justified his presence among them. In practice this meant repeated efforts to demonstrate

he was not seeking to lead the campaign but to afford residents platforms to speak, both to his social media audiences and beyond by attracting positive media attention.

Brand's claims to represent New Era were 'read back' by tabloid journalists. Contestation occurred on the grounds of wealth, a disconnect between Brand and 'ordinary people' which rendered him a 'hypocrite', and to a lesser extent a broader disconnect between his career as a controversy-courting comedian and seeking to be taken seriously. The question of whether Brand's wealth made him 'part of the problem' was raised by a journalist before Brand had even left Downing Street (Channel 4 News, 2014a), sparking a debate that dominated the political information cycle.

In this context it was crucial for Brand to demonstrate acceptance of his claims by their intended constituency: New Era residents. While the integration of Brand into campaign and community suggested acceptance, notable 'acceptance events' demonstrated overt acceptance from the voices Brand sought to 'amplify'. Arthurs and Little (2016: 102-3) argue Brand benefited from the 'Snidegate' interview because his 'angry outburst' demonstrated personal connection, while conflict with *The Sun* 'helped to ingratiate him with a left-wing audience'. I argue that accusations of hypocrisy unintentionally benefitted Brand in a further crucial way: to be defended, he first needed to be contested. Though *The Sun* argued that this self-proclaimed 'representative of the people' had been 'rejected by the people' (The Sun Says, 2014), Garrett's vocal defence of Brand on Downing Street demonstrated he had *not* been rejected by those whose acceptance mattered most.

Residents did not constitute the entire constituency, however. Brand's aim to mobilise support made it crucial others 'recognised their interests' as being implicated, judging his claims were also 'for and about them' (Saward, 2010: 148). Those who used social media to challenge Brand's critics displayed tacit acceptance, with those who

signed the petition or attended a protest lending support to his claim to represent the ‘word from the street’ (Saward, 2010: 99). I argue Brand afforded greater acceptance of his claims by setting ‘broad boundaries’, maintaining a distance from campaigners by constructing an ‘amplifying’ claim that did not seek to dictate their message but simply to lend his resources. This was important to negotiate the discomfort some protestors demonstrated in being seen to associate too closely with Brand, and to comfortably accommodate the multiple motivations they held for participating. Arthurs and Little (2016: 102) argue there was a crucial ‘alignment of intention’ among the actors involved in this case, who pulled ‘in the same direction, but also for the same reasons’. While a general ‘alignment of intention’ was important, the campaign was also able to comfortably incorporate the multiple priorities of supporters.

Even if Brand could not use his celebrity capital and media resources to achieve ‘amplification’, these lent fundamental support to his representative claims. The intrinsic interconnection between celebrity capital and representative claims can be seen both in how Brand constructed his claims and how these were evaluated. As the political information cycle around the Westbrook protest became focused on argument over who represented ‘the people’, Brand or *The Sun*, proxies for public opinion were used to assess the relative legitimacy of these claims. Brand’s high celebrity capital but most significantly his large social media audience were crucial, as journalists and citizens challenging *The Sun* did so through acceptance that Brand spoke for followers. This enabled Brand to use articles and tweets as evidence that his representative claims were supported. I therefore argue it is not simply evaluations by the ‘appropriate constituency’ for claims that are pertinent to whether celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital (Saward, 2010: 148), but the *evaluations of others* over whether the claim-maker speaks for this constituency. That defence of Brand was grounded in the argument he

spoke on behalf of a constituency demonstrates that the political value of his celebrity capital was contingent on claims to represent others.

4.4.2 To What Extent was Brand able to 'Amplify' New Era?

Brand certainly demonstrated an ability to accumulate celebrity capital during this period, but could not use this to 'amplify' New Era as he had intended. Contradicting Thrall et al.'s (2008) finding that celebrity activism has limited influence on political or entertainment news agendas, the protest was covered online by the UK's national newspapers, online-only news sites, local and international sources, and entertainment and gossip sites. Though Brand 'got the camera to come' he could not control the political information cycle around the Westbrook protest (Russell Brand, 2014i), in spite of using social media and YouTube to re-make claims and attempt to reclaim the agenda.

It took only one angry reaction to one journalist's question to divert attention away from the rent paid at New Era to that paid by Brand. Brand's aim to attract positive mainstream media attention was undermined by his pre-existing antagonistic relationship with a tabloid press to which he was now ideologically opposed. The campaign continued to be mentioned in the period between the protest and proclaimed victory only as a footnote to debate over whether Brand or his rivals possessed a stronger claim to speak on behalf of 'the people'.

While Brand's social media interventions were incorporated into rather than shifting the political information cycle, these resources facilitated 'amplification' in other ways. Social media afforded Brand an important platform where residents and campaign leaders could speak directly to Brand's audiences and appeal for their support. That the campaign was able to attract almost 300,000 signatures *before* receiving significant attention from news media suggests Brand's social media compensated for his lack of mainstream media platform. Thrall et al. (2008: 364) are correct to conclude celebrity

activism is more complex than ‘make noise-make news-make change’, but it is simplistic to argue success now comes from bypassing mainstream media. While Brand’s media resources did not afford him the control he hoped for, the campaign benefitted from his ability to both attract *and* bypass mainstream coverage. While ‘getting the camera to come’ heightened the national profile of the campaign and placed pressure on an otherwise unaccountable US property company, Brand’s platforms provided valuable tools for mobilising support and keeping supporters engaged.

Even though Brand could not control the political information cycle around the Westbrook protest, it was crucial to the process of claim-making and exchange that he was able to spark and sustain one. Having tied the political value of his celebrity capital to his claims to represent others, the political information cycle benefitted Brand by demonstrating his ability to rapidly and repeatedly accumulate celebrity capital to achieve this. While this cycle culminated in declarations of success for New Era and vindication for Brand, discussion of celebrity campaigns in Chapter 2 demonstrates the need to go beyond the headlines to assess who benefitted from Brand’s intervention.

4.4.3 A New Era for All? Who Benefitted from the Campaign?

Brand certainly benefitted from the campaign, and not only by receiving political recognition through acceptance of his representative claims. Argument over these kept Brand in the headlines, thereby accumulating celebrity capital, while attracting some of the largest ever audiences to his personal political platform *The Trews*. Arthurs and Little (2016: 98) argue that Brand also benefitted as association with New Era ‘helped to decontaminate his celebrity brand for left campaigners and establish his symbolic capital as an activist’. Brand clearly perceived continued benefit to associating the success of New Era with his brand, opening the *Trews*-branded Trew Era Café on the estate in March 2015. Ribke (2015: 108) argues there is a ‘cumulative effect operating in celebrity politics’, suggesting positive association with a successful campaign would make

boundary crossing between entertainment and politics easier for Brand in future. Chapter 5's analysis of an intervention by Brand in an election campaign shows however that this is limited by differing exchange rates along field boundaries (Giles, 2015), demonstrating the impermanence both of accepted representative claims and of political capital.

It is easy to assume that New Era residents benefitted from Brand's claims, with Lindsey Garrett (2014) stating the campaign had 'achieved exactly what we intended'. Assessing whether this was a celebrity-driven quick fix or long-term solution requires examining the deal struck after the cameras left. In August 2015 Dolphin Living (2015) confirmed that a 'radical new rent policy' had been agreed, with 'personalised' means tested rents and three-year tenancies. Dolphin has expressed interest in extending this scheme, a potential New Era legacy (BBC News, 2015b). While Dolphin describe this as 'radical' comparisons were drawn with Conservative Chancellor George Osborne's 'pay to stay' social housing policy (Altheer, 2014). In a BBC London radio interview Chief Executive John Gooding (2015) argued the deal was ground-breaking for a privately owned estate. Gooding reported Brand had attended a recent tenant's association meeting, stating 'I think the guy has made a real contribution to helping'. Brand therefore continued to demonstrate personal commitment to residents after the cameras left. Brand and camera returned for a *Drift Report* (2016) update with in March 2016, with residents reporting satisfaction with the agreement and on-going negotiations.

In January 2018 Dolphin Living announced plans to demolish and rebuild the estate due to the scale of improvements needed (Barnes, 2018). They promised residents would be offered somewhere to live during the rebuild, and homes at the new New Era at the same rent. Dolphin claimed that 84% of residents support this plan (Barnes, 2018); neither Brand nor the campaign have publically commented. In spite of this uncertainty the scale of the campaign's success should not be understated. Garrett (2014) recalled that their fight against a 'huge property developer' had initially seemed 'impossible', and

were Westbrook still New Era's owners residents would long since have been evicted. While following 'Snidegate' some of Brand's detractors argued that if he truly cared he would buy the estate, this truly would have been a superficial celebrity-driven solution; Brand cannot become the landlord of every priced-out Londoner.

There could be broader political benefits for grassroots housing campaigning, with New Era's success and the attention it attracted adding to a sense of momentum. In their final *Drift Report* (2016), residents who had 'never been on a march before' told viewers they were now regularly supporting other campaigns. The sense that a network of recognisable activists had been built around the housing crisis was reinforced by the presence of activists from Focus E15 and New Era at the March for Homes protest in January 2015. Organisers cited these campaigns as evidence that activism works, with both Garrett and Focus E15's Jasmine Stone frequently pictured and quoted in coverage. The outcome of the campaign sets a positive political precedent; a move away from the idea that those who cannot afford to live in London should move away.

From a broader perspective, we again see the benefits of celebrity campaigns co-existing with potentially negative outcomes. Coverage largely ignored the role of politicians in negotiating on behalf of New Era, while Brand's declaration of triumph against 'apathetic' and 'lazy' politicians actively obscured this. Brand constructed claims in direct opposition to politicians, portrayed as the bad guys or 'scrooges' on a par with property companies at both protests. This demonstrates an interesting tension. Populist rhetoric certainly acted as a rhetorical resource for Brand and was a valuable vehicle for mobilising necessary public engagement. Protestors saw New Era as an opportunity to express broader disillusionment with their Mayor, Chancellor, Prime Minister, and austerity politics. Brand's claim to be representing 'ignored' voices was not disingenuous. The attention New Era received brought a company keen to press ahead with raising rents to the negotiating table, and the willingness of Boris Johnson to send a deputy to these

negotiations was an interesting anomaly in his general approach to housing as Mayor.⁵ Brand's persistent construction of politicians as the opposition however gives the impression that politicians are unable or unwilling to resolve citizens' problems. This is both an inaccurate portrayal of how grassroots campaigning and formal politics worked together in this case, and could have negative implications for political trust (Stoker, 2006; Tormey, 2015).

4.5 Conclusion

A rent freeze and a change of ownership is not exactly a revolution but in modern Britain, it can feel like one.

Paul Mason (Channel 4 News, 2014c)

Russell Brand's ability to attract media attention, and share his social media platforms with campaigners, was crucial to a mobilisation of support that led to their seemingly unlikely victory against a consortium of property developers. The effort Brand expended throughout the campaign to show personal commitment to and negotiate his role within it demonstrates that celebrity claims must be constructed with care. Brand's celebrity capital justified his intervention in the political field but was also, along with the economic capital he has simultaneously accumulated, a barrier to be negotiated.

These seemingly conflicting conclusions are both explained by the connection between celebrity capital and representative claims, illustrated by the political information cycle around the Westbrook protest. Though Brand could not control this cycle its underlying focus on whether he could claim to represent New Era worked to his advantage in unanticipated ways, as contestation from journalists was met with vocal acceptance from residents. A broader defence of Brand rested on the assumption that he represents an audience made tangible through social media metrics. While Brand faced

⁵ When the sale of New Era was announced Johnson was in Singapore encouraging investment (Phipps, 2014). The use of new build properties as investments rather than as homes is cited as a cause of London's housing crisis (Booth and Clark, 2015). As Mayor of London Johnson also failed to meet targets on landlord accreditation and building affordable homes (Watts, 2014).

contestation he was therefore able to exchange his celebrity capital for political capital, with his recognition in the political field contingent on the successful performance of claims to represent those others did not.

That these claims were constructed in opposition to elected representatives, some of whose work was also necessary to the success of the campaign, demonstrates a further tension. Brand's continued use of a populist 'us versus them' style helped to set broad boundaries for his claims, comfortably incorporating citizens with multiple priorities and a discomfort around associating too closely with the celebrity comedian. This also painted an inaccurate and unhelpful picture of the potential for grassroots and formal politics to work together to benefit citizens. Ultimately however Brand's use of his celebrity capital and media resources to support rather than lead the New Era campaign provided a platform for them to speak without dictating their words, and was necessary to them achieving greater security.

5. 'If he can help us reach voters, so be it': How were Celebrity Endorsements of the Labour Party in 2015 Evaluated?

Politics, and life, and elections, and jobs, and the economy: that's not a joke. Russell Brand's a joke, right? Ed Miliband hang out with Russell Brand, he's a joke. This is not funny. This is about the election, this is about our future.

David Cameron (The Guardian, 2015)

I notice that the Conservatives try to raise the idea of celebrities as somehow a desperation measure for Labour, but they wouldn't do that if they had many so-called celebrities endorsing them.

Steve Coogan (Channel 4 News, 2015b)

On April 27th 2015 one of Russell Brand's neighbours photographed Labour leader Ed Miliband leaving Brand's East London flat. A spokesperson responded, cryptically, that 'Ed was doing a media interview like he often does' (Labour List, 2015b). Politicians may frequently give interviews outside traditional news platforms, but this was hardly politics as usual. The interview known as 'Milibrand', filmed in Brand's kitchen for his YouTube series *The Trews*, made Brand one of the most talked about figures in campaign coverage (LCRC, 2015). A 90-second 'trailer' was enough to make the front page of four national newspapers, with the Conservative-supporting tabloid press condemning Miliband's unorthodox campaign tactic as 'desperate' (Doyle, 2015). Just three days prior to polling Brand released the additional footage he 'found most encouraging', telling English viewers that they 'gotta vote Labour' (Russell Brand, 2015d).

Miliband justified the interview as an effort to reach citizens outside the 'empty stadium' of the mainstream campaign (BBC News, 2015a). Comedian Steve Coogan argued celebrities were needed to 'redress the imbalance', in a campaign where attacks on Miliband were regularly front-page news (Channel 4 News, 2015b).⁶ While in 2010

⁶ The Media Standards Trust (Moore, 2015: 57) found that for each positive front page about Labour in the national press there were two negative, and for each positive leader column there were four negative. Cushion and Sambrook (2015) argue that front-page attacks on Miliband were not only a regular feature of newspaper coverage but also influenced the wider media agenda, including evening news broadcasts.

both the Labour and Conservative campaigns featured celebrity supporters, in 2015 the value of celebrity became a point of division. Celebrities fronted three of Labour's five Party Election Broadcasts (hereafter referred to as PEB) and celebrities were integrated into constituency campaigning, national media events, and online fundraising. In contrast, David Cameron dismissed Russell Brand as a 'joke' (The Guardian, 2015). Months after their election victory Conservative ministers mocked Labour's celebrity supporters as out-of-touch millionaires (Wheeler, 2015).

Labour's PEB - fronted by Martin Freeman, Steve Coogan and Jo Brand - were uploaded to YouTube and shared on party social media in addition to being shown on television. This makes them an interesting case for investigating the role of political information cycles in how celebrity claims are evaluated in electoral contexts. Freeman's was viewed online over a million times in the campaign's first two days (Labour List, 2015a), while the two 'Milibrand' videos have been viewed over two million times on Brand's YouTube channel alone. In contrast Miliband and Cameron's 'Battle for Number 10' interviews with Jeremy Paxman were watched by 3.2 million (Plunkett, 2015), suggesting celebrity endorsements should be taken seriously as campaign media. However just as Cameron dismissed Brand as 'a joke' we can't assume celebrities were taken seriously as political actors, with existing literature finding a 'stigma associated with celebrity in politics' (Brubaker, 2011: 29).

This chapter examines the process of celebrity claim-making and exchange in the context of electoral politics, asking how celebrities claimed to represent citizens as they intervened in the campaign. I use media coverage to reconstruct the political information cycles around endorsements, asking whether the combination of celebrity capital and social media enabled celebrities to 'bypass' negative mainstream coverage of Labour's campaign. I also examine the role of these cycles in how endorsements were evaluated by citizens, using content analysis of responses on Twitter to assess whether claims were

accepted or rejected and on what grounds. I consider not only whether celebrities were able to exchange celebrity capital for political capital in this context, but also whether politicians, celebrities, or citizens benefitted from their interventions.

Labour's celebrity endorsers attempted to negotiate the complexities of claim-making in an electoral context through 'performances of authenticity', claiming shared values with viewers to construct distance from politicians. Claims are not evaluated in isolation, but in context both of political information cycles and broader campaign coverage. Celebrities often received negative coverage from the Conservative-supporting press, with wealth and class-based judgements over behaviour used to contest their political credibility. The factor provoking strongest 'reading back' both in media coverage and citizen responses was inconsistency, with Russell Brand's 'U-turn' undermining claims to represent the interests of his large social media audience. I find however that a perceived *lack* of celebrity capital most hinders its exchange for political capital. Celebrity capital is attributed political value where an endorsement is seen to hold strategic benefits for politicians, necessitating acceptance the celebrity can 'reach' others and represent their views. In this context - where celebrities must spark political information cycles but these are dominated by contestation - celebrities were unable to obtain political capital, and there is little evidence of benefits for politicians or citizens.

5.1 Context and Theoretical Expectations

5.1.1 Celebrity and the Labour Party

Labour have a history of associating with celebrities. Previous examples demonstrate potential benefits but also risk, perhaps explaining the increasing tendency of celebrities to support 'Get Out The Vote' rather than partisan campaigns (Wood and Herbst, 2007). In *Walls Come Tumbling Down* Rachel (2016) documents the unprecedented 'direct alignment' between pop music and partisan politics that came with Red Wedge. This

collective of musicians and comedians toured marginal constituencies in 1987 aiming to ‘bolster the youth vote’ (Rachel, 2016: 482). Red Wedge laid the ‘cultural foundation’ for New Labour’s courting of ‘Cool Britannia’ in 1997 (Rachel, 2016: 339), with both cases demonstrating the uneasy relationship between ‘unpredictable’ musicians and eventually unpopular politicians (Wheeler, 2013: 74). Red Wedge were accused of being ‘sell-outs’, with Billy Bragg reflecting ‘it’s very hard to get in the mud with the politicians and not get some of it on you’ (Rachel, 2016: 472). For celebrities whose ‘coolness’ stems from an association with rebellion, popularity is put at risk if they are seen as ‘cosying up to the establishment’ (Wheeler, 2013: 74).

Having appeared alongside Gary Barlow at a campaign event in 2010 David Cameron later had to defend him against revelations that he had used a tax avoidance scheme (Wintour and Syal, 2012). Cameron did not appear to want the ‘Take That’ singer back on the campaign trail in 2015, instead using the absence of celebrity from the Conservative campaign as a positive point of difference. Arthurs and Little (2016: 109) argue Cameron’s dismissal of Brand as ‘a joke’ was indicative of the ‘clear line’ drawn between the groups the parties were targeting. While we cannot know whether Steve Coogan was right to suggest the Conservatives denigrated celebrities because they lacked their support, I find this dismissal of celebrity as having low political value resonates with citizens. High celebrity capital is seen to have *strategic* value for politicians, however, where the celebrity is accepted as speaking for others.

5.1.2 Assessing ‘Non-Electoral’ Claims in Election Campaigns

While the literature on celebrity endorsements discussed in section 2.4 focuses on whether endorsements influence voting intentions, it suggests they are not simply evaluated according to volume of celebrity capital. Endorsements may be evaluated more positively if the celebrity has presented a consistent image (Jackson and Darrow, 2005; McCracken, 1989), and if they are consistent with past political statements and audience

expectations (Štechová and Hájek, 2015). Celebrities will be judged not only against past performances but also political and cultural norms, including class trajectory and hierarchies of genre (Mendick et al., 2018; Ribke, 2015; Skeggs and Wood, 2011; Wood, 2017). These factors are likely to present greater barriers in the ‘elite’ context of election campaigns, particularly for those lacking the ‘legitimate manner’ of the political field (Bourdieu, 1984: 112). I therefore contribute to literature on celebrity endorsements by considering them in context, something I argue experimental and survey research does not enable. Studying endorsements as representative claims allows us to consider the influence of political information cycles on how they are evaluated, and account for the fact that endorsements like other ‘celebrity political statements’ will not always be received as intended (Nisbett and DeWalt, 2016).

It is not only how individuals evaluate endorsements that could have implications for the exchangeability of celebrity capital, but how they think *others* respond. Brubaker (2011: 29) suggests ‘stigma associated with celebrities in politics’ leads people to ‘distance themselves’ even from celebrities who support ‘their’ candidate. Her survey research also found however that individuals feel ‘the public’ *would* be influenced by a celebrity endorsement. The significance of this ‘third person effect’ was shown by Pease and Brewer (2008). Their experiment found Oprah Winfrey’s endorsement of Obama led participants to rate his chances of winning more highly due to the perception *others* would be influenced, in turn making them more likely to vote Obama themselves. This suggests an interesting contradiction whereby citizens perceive endorsements to be strategically valuable for candidates, but the celebrities making them as lacking the credibility to legitimately intervene in an election.

In Chapter 4 I argued Russell Brand used populist rhetoric as a resource, positioning himself in opposition to political elites by claiming to represent those politicians were ignoring. Saward (2010: 107) distinguishes between electoral and non-

electoral claims, with demonstrating ‘independence’ from or being ‘untainted’ by formal political structures a strong resource for supporting the latter. When celebrities endorse politicians, both types of claim exist in uneasy proximity. The celebrity not only makes ‘non-electoral’ claims to understand citizens’ interests, but also ‘electoral’ claims on behalf of politicians:

1. **The celebrity** (maker) *claims that they* (subject) *represent the interests of the electorate* (the referent)
2. **The celebrity** (maker) *claims that the party/politician* (subject) *represent the interests of the electorate* (the referent)

I focus on the former, the claims the celebrity makes about their capacity to represent others that underpin the process of exchanging celebrity capital for political capital. In performing these, I find that celebrities attempt to negotiate the tensions arising from the co-construction of these two claim types.

Non-electoral claims are generally evaluated through ‘two broad modes of reception’: authorization and authenticity (Saward, 2010: 103). Celebrity endorsers possess a ‘connection’ to ‘conventionally legitimate institutional structures’ through incorporation into party campaigns, which may afford ‘authorization’ (Saward, 2010: 104). This is not necessarily sufficient, as Štechová and Hájek (2015: 342) found that citizens often see celebrities as not possessing ‘certain necessary competencies to justify commenting’ on elections. Perhaps a bigger issue is that in a context of low trust in politicians (Hay, 2007), ‘connection’ with party politics would not seem a strong basis for appealing to citizens. Celebrities may also struggle to claim the ‘independence’ from political interests or institutions that can lend claims a sense of ‘authenticity’ and ‘genuineness’ (Saward, 2010: 107). As we saw in Chapter 4 that celebrities can benefit

from ‘widespread disillusion’ with formal politics (Saward, 2010: 107), electoral endorsements present different challenges in close proximity to politicians.

In a 2018 interview, Jo Brand lamented that she sometimes feels she must ‘make a case for being allowed to care’ about politics (Wiseman, 2018). This case study examines how celebrities made a case for being allowed to care about the outcome of the 2015 general election, by making claims to represent citizens’ interests. I argue they negotiated these tensions through ‘performances of authenticity’. While the four celebrities constructed claims differently these performances had two key features. Firstly, claims were presented as ‘genuine’ by framing motivations for endorsing Labour within ‘personal’ values. Secondly celebrities attempted to overcome proximity to politicians by constructing distance, usually by positioning themselves among citizens. Demonstrating ‘genuineness’ also sometimes required negotiating potential ‘markers of inauthenticity’, such as high celebrity or economic capital. However as Štechová and Hájek (2015) found that celebrities are often considered one of ‘them’ rather than ‘us’, we should not assume these performances afford acceptance of claims and exchange of celebrity capital.

5.2 Methods and Data

I begin analysis in each case by assessing how the celebrity made representative claims. I use the YouTube videos uploaded to the Labour Party channel of each party election broadcast (Labour Party 2015a; 2015b; 2015c), and the two videos of interview footage uploaded to Russell Brand’s YouTube channel (2015b; 2015d). I then reconstruct the political information cycle around the endorsement, before using content analysis of tweets to assess how the celebrity was evaluated. The coding manual, full results tables, intercoder reliability testing, and all news coverage used can be seen in Appendix B.

5.2.1 Using Media Coverage to Reconstruct Political Information Cycles

From the date of their intervention in the campaign I used Google Alerts to collect all mentions of each celebrity on online news and blog sources daily, listing all links to

election-related content chronologically in an Evernote document. I used ‘#TomorrowsPapersToday’ to monitor newspaper front pages,⁷ collecting copies of the four national newspapers which made ‘Milibrand’ front-page news. Following the election I used Box of Broadcasts to search for coverage on the following national television and radio news programmes: *BBC News at Ten*, *Newsnight* (BBC 2), *Today* (BBC Radio 4), *ITV News at Ten*, and *Channel 4 News*. I use this to reconstruct the political information cycle around each celebrity’s intervention,⁸ focusing on the scale and tone of content, assessment of representative claims, and how key interventions shaped coverage.

5.2.2 Using Tweets to Analyse Individual Evaluations of Endorsements

I collected tweets using TAGS, a template for collecting tweets from Twitter’s search API in Google Sheets.⁹ For Martin Freeman, Jo Brand and Steve Coogan, all tweets mentioning their name were collected from the date their PEB was uploaded to YouTube. Anticipating Russell Brand’s intervention would attract more tweets I conducted multiple collections: tweets including ‘Russell Brand’, tweets including ‘Russell Brand AND Ed Miliband’, and tweets including ‘#Milibrand’. With the first returning over 200,000 tweets, I selected the second set for analysis as this was less dominated by automated tweets sharing the interview from YouTube. Table 5.1 below shows the number of tweets collected and analysed in each case. To create data sets for content analysis of individual responses to endorsements I removed all retweets, then removed all tweets clearly published by organisational rather than individual accounts.

⁷ #TomorrowsPapersToday is a Twitter hashtag used by BBC News editors to tweet images of the front and back pages of the following day’s national newspapers.

⁸ See section 4.2 for discussion and definition of political information cycles.

⁹ TAGS (Twitter Archiving Google Spreadsheet) allows users to collect tweets published up to nine days previously. For more information on TAGS see Hawksee (2014).

Table 5.1. Number of tweets collected and analysed

	Martin Freeman	Jo Brand	Steve Coogan	Russell Brand
Search term used	‘Martin Freeman’	‘Jo Brand’	‘Steve Coogan’	‘Russell Brand AND Ed Miliband’
Total tweets collected	35,926	5,340	22,274	48,514
Total unique tweets used for content analysis	3,762	415	2,288	4,296

Note: Total tweets used for content analysis = 10,761

I developed a coding framework for content analysis with 28 discrete variables, coding each of the 10,761 tweets as an individual unit of analysis and recording results in Excel spreadsheets. The framework consists of four sections: ‘general responses’, ‘markers of (in)authenticity’, ‘perceptions of (in)authenticity’, and ‘sources’. The nine variables in the ‘general responses’ section (G1-G9) record the tone of tweets toward endorsements (coded as 0 for negative, 1 for neutral or 2 for positive), and speculation over whether an endorsement could have a strategic impact on the campaign (0 for absent, 1 for negative, 2 for positive). All other variables are coded as being either absent (0) or present (1). This includes coding whether a tweet reported feeling more or less positive about the party, and more or less positive about the celebrity.

The 11 variables in the ‘markers of (in)authenticity’ section (M10-M20) record whether a tweet notes a specific factor in their evaluation of the endorsement. These factors are drawn from political information cycles (for example M13 – accusation of tax avoidance) and existing literature on factors which may influence how celebrities are evaluated (for example M16 – inconsistency between the celebrity’s career and their endorsement).

The first two ‘perceptions of (in)authenticity’ variables (P21-P22) record whether a tweet referred to the celebrity’s attempts to ‘perform authenticity’ in their endorsement,

for example negatively by rejecting claims to ‘ordinariness’ or positively by accepting their performance as ‘genuine’. The others (P23-24) record whether they overtly accept or contest an accusation of inauthenticity made against the celebrity, usually by a journalist or political opponent. Finally the four ‘sources’ variables (S1-S4) note which sources are linked to in the tweet or where the tweeter mentions seeing the endorsement, and will be used to situate responses within political information cycles.

5.2.3 Limitations

The strength of this multifaceted approach is the ability to situate the making and evaluation of representative claims in the context of the campaign, something I argued in section 2.4 is a weakness of survey and experimental research on endorsements. However there are limitations to our ability to draw broader conclusions over how citizens evaluate celebrity endorsements from this research. Analysis of citizen responses is limited as they are drawn from a single platform, and while I used broad search terms for data collection not all relevant tweets will have included the celebrity’s full name.

TAGS is unable to collect all tweets including a search term as it uses Twitter's search API, which 'is focused on relevance and not completeness' meaning 'some Tweets and users may be missing' (Twitter Developer, 2016). González-Bailón et al. (2012) found while using broader search terms helps, the search API over-represents more central users at the expense of those on the periphery and is biased against tweets directed at other users (replies). While this is of greater concern for research aiming to analyse networks rather than use tweets as individual units of analysis, I cannot account for how missing tweets vary from those collected.

I argue that manual coding of tweets is more appropriate than computer-assisted text analysis due to the need to assess tone, sentiment, and the relationship between responses and other content. The subjectivity of human coding however further limits the

generalisability of results. To reduce the problem of coder bias most variables were measured on a present-absent basis (Aalberg et. al., 2011). I discuss intercoder reliability further and present results of a test using a second coder in Appendix B. Krippendorff's Alpha reached an acceptable level for all variables.

Before using the results of this content analysis to assess how individuals responded to celebrity endorsements, I now examine how celebrities constructed claims to represent citizens' interests in this context. I discuss each celebrity in turn in the order they intervened, beginning - as Labour's campaign did - with Martin Freeman.

5.3 Case 1: Martin Freeman

5.3.1 Freeman's PEB: Choosing Childhood Values

Actor Martin Freeman is best known for roles across television and film sharing 'everyman' characteristics. While Freeman rejects this label as 'amazingly boring' (Lukowski, 2017), this association with an 'ordinary' image may support claims to represent ordinary people (Ribke, 2015). When Freeman endorsed Labour his celebrity capital and position in the field of entertainment were particularly high. In 2014 he reprised his role in *Sherlock*, a television series with a large fandom that attracted a UK audience of 12 million, and starred in the final instalment of *The Hobbit* film trilogy that grossed nearly \$3 billion worldwide. While Freeman does not use social media, claiming he is 'too gobby' (Sweeney, 2015), others were certainly talking about him. With high celebrity capital, association with an 'ordinary' image and this fan following, Freeman would appear well-placed to provoke both high interest and positive responses to his endorsement. After his PEB was uploaded to YouTube on the first day of the official campaign (March 30) it was viewed over a million times in less than two days, 13 times more than a Conservative PEB. This led Labour List (2015a) to boast Labour were 'winning the web war'.

In 'The Choice' Freeman frames the election as a choice between two sets of values, associating Labour with 'community, compassion and fairness' (Labour Party, 2015a). Freeman presents his support for Labour as 'genuinely felt interest' by rooting these values, framed as motivating his endorsement, in his childhood (Saward, 2010: 104). 'My values are community, compassion, decency', Freeman tells the viewer, 'that's how I was brought up' (Labour Party, 2015a). By connecting back to childhood Freeman negotiates the economic and celebrity capital he has since accumulated, while explicitly acknowledging his limited ability to 'mirror' citizens by acknowledging he is now 'one of the privileged few'.

Freeman claims to speak in the interests of viewers by constructing a set of values they are assumed to share, prefacing his list of 'my values' with 'I don't know about you, but'. He uses patriotism to forge a connection with the audience, arguing these values are 'the best thing about this country' before adding 'I *love* this country so much...and I think you do too'. By using qualifiers such as 'I don't know about you', Freeman constructs claims to speak in viewers' interests at a slight distance. Indeed Freeman never explicitly *tells* viewers to vote Labour. Instead he sets out the 'choice *we* make' in the election 'the way I see it', using the shared values he has constructed to explain why 'for *me*, there's only one choice, and *I choose Labour*'. Freeman acts as an informed citizen sharing his view with other citizens, telling them 'we' face a choice based on shared 'values'.

This enables Freeman to construct 'independence' from political institutions even as he endorses Labour (Saward, 2010: 104). Throughout the broadcast he uses language and gestures that position him alongside the viewer, among an audience of potential voters. Freeman gestures outward as he tells the viewer Labour's economic plan will work for 'all of us', raising an eyebrow and gesturing toward himself as he describes the 'privileged few, like me' prioritised by opponents (Labour Party, 2015a). In doing so he

performs authenticity by claiming to represent the interests of ‘all of us’, rather than being motivated by his own interests.

Freeman positions himself among citizens in opposition to ‘politics’, performing sympathy with viewers presumed to be already bored of the campaign and distrustful of politicians. He does this from the start, telling the viewer they will hear ‘loads of claims’ and punctuating this with an exasperated sigh before continuing ‘it’s gonna drive you mad, it will probably drive me mad’. Freeman draws attention to his repeated use of the word ‘guarantee’ by following this on the third occasion with ‘*that* word again’, as if acknowledging scepticism toward politicians’ promises. Combining this with his emphasis on values, Freeman performs representative claims by constructing a ‘shared’ vision of the election. On this basis he recommends a course of action, voting Labour, claimed to be in the interests of the citizens he aligns himself with.

5.3.2 The Political Information Cycle around Freeman’s Endorsement

Between March 30th and April 2nd 43 articles were published online about Freeman’s endorsement, more attention than Jo Brand or Coogan attracted. Freeman’s high celebrity capital was recognised in coverage that introduced him as the ‘Sherlock’, ‘Hobbit’ or ‘Hollywood’ star, even ‘big-name actor’ and ‘one of the biggest actors in the world at the moment’ (The Herald, 2015; Vinter, 2015). A *MailOnline* piece among the first to be published described Freeman’s support as a ‘coup’ even while criticising Labour, suggesting Miliband’s absence from the PEB was evidence of his unpopularity. Freeman’s support is judged to be a ‘coup’ because of his ‘celebrity stardust’, deemed to be higher than that of celebrities Labour ‘relied’ on previously (Chorley, 2015). ‘Hollywood star’ Freeman is described as a ‘big celebrity endorsement’, suggesting the higher an endorser’s celebrity capital the greater value their support has.

This recognition on the grounds of Freeman's high celebrity capital was swiftly undermined. The next day *MailOnline* now declared that the support of 'one of Britain's most bankable Hollywood stars' *had* 'seemed like a major coup' (Groves, 2015). The cause of this reappraisal? Within hours of the PEB's release, right-wing blogger Guido Fawkes posted allegations connecting Freeman with tax avoidance. This – reinforced by other allegations of 'unsocialist' behaviour - went on to dominate the political information cycle. For Conservative-supporting journalists and bloggers these accusations were a means not only of questioning the value of Freeman's endorsement, but also contesting the values on which he had based his representative claims.

Fawkes' (2015a) piece 'Tax Dodge Shame of Labour Election Star' claimed Freeman had 'allowed' his then partner and co-star Amanda Abbington to go bankrupt to avoid a tax bill, referencing 2013 *Mirror* article 'Morally Bankrupt' (Phillips, 2013). Noting Freeman's net worth Fawkes described both as 'luvvies', suggesting their wealth and profession are incompatible with support for a centre-left party. Fawkes (2015a) also accused Freeman of political inconsistency, integrating old interviews expressing criticism of Tony Blair and support for the Socialist Labour Party.

Freeman, who does not use social media, did not intervene to contest these accusations. Abbington showed support for Freeman by tweeting (then swiftly deleting) '#FuckTheTories', countering that she 'didn't avoid a tax bill. I declared myself bankrupt then paid it off in full' (CHIMPSINSOCKS, 2015). This was wholly ineffective, as Abbington's tweet drew further attention to her tax affairs with even the two pieces that noted her rebuttal focusing on the couple's wealth (Swinford, 2015; Pass Notes, 2015). This focus on tax avoidance led *The Spectator* to claim Freeman's PEB had 'unravelling' on the first day (Payne, 2015). A further piece highlighting Freeman's political inconsistency contested his claim that there was 'only one choice' for him, as 'alas for Labour that hasn't always strictly been the case' (Steerpike, 2015a). Tax avoidance

allegations were used to contest Freeman's sincerity, questioning whether he was genuinely willing as a 'high earner' to pay more tax in the interests of others.

Interventions by Guido Fawkes continued to drive 'reading back' on the basis of Freeman's wealth, with revelations his son attended private school and he once stated that he would hypothetically use private healthcare used to question his support for public services. Fawkes presented these in direct contradiction to Freeman's performance of authenticity, arguing the 'fairness' and 'community' he aligned himself with 'does not stretch to his own family' (Fawkes, 2015b; 2015c). A *MailOnline* piece (Groves, 2015), which has received over a thousand comments, used these accusations to attack the credibility of 'Red Ed's celebrity phoney'. This argued his endorsement *had* appeared a 'much needed boost for Labour as Freeman is a good deal more famous' than other supporters. Freeman's potentially valuable celebrity capital was now voided, his endorsement deemed an 'embarrassment'.

On April 3rd clips of Freeman's endorsement were shown on *Gogglebox* (2015), a popular *Channel 4* series (2013 – present) that films friends and family watching television. Freeman's performance of authenticity prompted debate: was he 'sincere', or 'corny'? Was he a 'working-class actor' who had 'worked for' his wealth? Discussion focused on why Miliband had not presented the broadcast as he 'should', and scepticism over Freeman's repeated use of the word 'guarantee'. The segment concluded with popular young participant Scarlett Moffatt declaring, 'I'm not taking political advice from a fucking hobbit'.

Abington's #FuckTheTories tweet placed Freeman, to whom it was misattributed, on a list of celebrities who 'luvvie being rude about Tories' in a final *MailOnline* (Johnson, 2015) piece on April 19th. This combined dismissal of Labour-supporting actors as 'luvvies' with the 'champagne socialist' trope we saw used against Brand in Chapter 4.

While it is unsurprising that Conservative-supporting bloggers and journalists used these tropes, accusations of tax avoidance were noted across the majority of coverage. What matters therefore is the extent to which evaluations of Freeman’s claims followed the political information cycle, undermining Labour’s ability to use celebrity capital and social media to bypass critical coverage.

5.3.3 Twitter Responses To Freeman

Responses to Freeman on Twitter demonstrate the paradox described by Brubaker (2011) as ‘third person effects’. Responses were more likely to be negative (39.9%) than positive (27.2%) as Table 5.2 below shows, but more likely to speculate his endorsement would have a positive impact on Labour’s campaign. Freeman’s endorsement was viewed as holding potential strategic benefits for Labour due to his high celebrity capital, his perceived popularity underpinning excitement from Labour supporters that a ‘good’ celebrity had joined their team. However the exchangeability of Freeman’s capital was undermined by ‘reading back’, as wealth and accusations of tax avoidance disrupted claims to be ‘one of us’.

Table 5.2. Tone of tweets toward Freeman (percentages)

Variable	Negative	Neutral	Positive
G1 – Tone of Tweet toward endorsement	39.9	32.9	27.2

Responses to Freeman’s endorsement represented less than 50% of tweets collected, suggesting a steady stream of discussion by fans at this time (which did not coincide with key releases featuring Freeman). While some positive responses came from fans happy to see Freeman supporting Labour, or simply happy to see him, the majority of those tweeting about Freeman did not appear interested in his politics. Fans who did mention the endorsement were usually responding to negative tweets, not supporting Freeman’s claims but simply imploring others to leave him alone.

Table 5.3. Perceptions of (in)authenticity in responses to Freeman

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
P21 – Contesting performance of authenticity	5.7
P22 – Accepting/supporting performance of authenticity	3.7

While Freeman positioned himself in opposition to ‘politics’, responses lend support to Štechová and Hájek’s (2015) finding that celebrities are often evaluated as one of ‘them’. 5.7% of responses (see Table 5.3 above) directly contested Freeman’s performance of authenticity, rejecting his efforts to position himself among ‘us’. Negative responses often cited hypocrisy, Freeman’s wealth often noted alongside that of politicians. This grouping together of Freeman and politicians demonstrates the difficulty celebrities face in constructing distance from partisan politics. Some expressed disappointment in Freeman for ‘selling out’, with Table 5.4 below showing people were more likely to report a changed attitude toward Freeman than toward Labour. Labour were accused of having made a ‘bad choice’, or needing a celebrity to ‘step in’ for a weak leader.

Table 5.4. Sentiment change in responses to Freeman

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
G2 – More positive about party	4.0
G3 – Less positive about party	3.6
G4 – More positive about celebrity	6.0
G5 – Less positive about celebrity	8.0

Negative responses also came as expressions of disinterest and distancing, objections to Labour’s assumption they would be interested in Freeman’s opinion. The assumption *others* take celebrities seriously can be seen in the higher proportion of tweets suggesting the endorsement would have a positive impact on Labour’s campaign (4.5%) than negative (1.2%) (see Table 5.5 below). Judgements that securing Freeman’s support was ‘impressive’ were based on perceived popularity, and the high number of views his PEB received online. Freeman’s endorsement inspired a tweet from encouraged

supporters which circulated more widely as the campaign developed: that Labour had ‘good’ celebrity support while the Conservatives’ was ‘bad’. While these judgements had a moral element, with controversial columnist Katie Hopkins’ support for the Conservatives often referenced, they were usually based on the perceived strategic value of high celebrity capital. ‘Good’, as becomes more apparent as I consider Labour’s other endorsers, meant ‘popular’.

Table 5.5. Percentage of tweets speculating on Freeman’s strategic impact

Variable	Absent	Negative	Positive
G8 – Strategy Response	94.2	1.2	4.5

Table 5.6 below shows Freeman’s claims were most frequently contested on the basis of wealth (8.1%) and accusations of tax avoidance (7.5%). Several tweets linked to a spoof site claiming Freeman was the ‘world’s richest actor’, who sold a perfume called ‘With Love from Martin’ (Kearney, 2015). The ‘other’ marker of inauthenticity noted most frequently (7%) was that Freeman allegedly did not use public services. Combined this created a sense expressed in negative responses that Freeman and Abbingdon did not ‘play by the same rules’, undermining his claims to shared values with citizens.

Table 5.6. Markers of (in)authenticity in responses to Freeman

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
M10 – Consistency – previous political statements/actions	0.2
M11 – Inconsistency – previous political statements/actions	1.0
M12 – Inconsistency – wealth	8.1
M13 – Accusation of tax avoidance	7.5
M14 – Inconsistency – moral judgement	0.1
M15 – Consistency – career and endorsement	0.2
M16 – Inconsistency – career and endorsement	2.3
M17 – Accusation of self-interest	0.7
M18 – Other marker of consistency	0.0
M19 – Other marker of inconsistency	7.0

Freeman's acting career was deemed inconsistent with politics in 2.3% of responses, usually as further evidence he is an out of touch 'luvvie' but also to contest his sincerity as someone experienced in 'reciting scripts'. Freeman's opinion *as an actor* was usually dismissed through reference to a letter published in *The Telegraph* two days after his intervention, where over 100 'business leaders' endorsed the Conservatives (Quinn and Monaghan, 2015). This supports Inthorn and Street's (2011) finding that business expertise affords perceived political credibility, while further demonstrating Freeman's own claims to political capital were not evaluated in isolation from the broader campaign.

Freeman's claims were contested on the basis of wealth more than others not because he was perceived to be wealthier, but due to accusations of tax avoidance which dominated the political information cycle. The influence of key interventions can also be seen in which markers of inauthenticity were *not* used to contest Freeman's claims more frequently. 44 tweets rejected Freeman's intervention due to racist and misogynistic comments made in interviews, often referring to his dedicated page on the blog 'Your Fave is Problematic' (2013). Without being integrated into media coverage these remained isolated comments with few retweets, while 65% of tweets noting 'other' markers of inauthenticity referenced articles by Guido Fawkes.

Table 5.7. Sources referenced in responses to Freeman

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
S1 – Link to news article or blog	26.5
S2 – Link to endorsement	17.8
S3 – PEB seen on TV	9.5
S4 – Endorsement seen on other source	8.2

The extent to which evaluations followed the political information cycle is unsurprising when, as Table 5.7 above shows, 26.5% of responses shared a link to a news article or blog. Almost as many referenced seeing the endorsement through an alternative source (8.2%) as in its traditional television spots (9.5%). These were almost exclusively references to *Gogglebox*, demonstrating that significant interventions can come from

unanticipated sources. Following *Gogglebox* (2015) criticism based on scepticism of Labour’s ‘guarantees’ became a recurring theme that had previously been almost absent. A sceptical response from the ‘ordinary people’ of *Gogglebox* was used to argue that Freeman’s PEB had been rejected. Responses were also more likely (as Table 5.8 below shows) to demonstrate overt acceptance of an accusation of inauthenticity (11.9%), for example that Freeman avoided paying tax, than to contest such an accusation (4%). Even contestation of Freeman’s critics was usually *not* defence of Freeman himself, but simply dismissal of attacks from Conservative-supporting journalists as ‘inevitable’.

Table 5.8. Perceptions of (in) authenticity in responses to Freeman

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
P23 – Contesting accusation of inauthenticity	4.2
P24 – Accepting/supporting accusation of inauthenticity	11.9

Labour’s next celebrity-fronted PEB provides an interesting contrast. While Freeman’s high celebrity capital was perceived to have potential strategic benefits, exchangeability was hindered by ‘reading back’ of his claims on the grounds of wealth and alleged tax avoidance. Aside from the encouragement afforded to Labour activists that a Hollywood star supported their ‘team’, there is little evidence of Freeman’s endorsement leading either to political capital for him or political benefits for others. While Freeman’s endorsement was undermined by the political information cycle around it, in Jo Brand’s case lack of media interest was taken as evidence of insufficient celebrity capital to make a political impact.

5.4 Case 2: Jo Brand

5.4.1 Jo Brand’s PEB: *Speaking from Experience*

Comedian, writer and actor Jo Brand appears regularly on British television in sitcoms, satirical panel shows, and light entertainment programmes. Brand previously worked as

a mental health nurse, and has integrated this experience into her personal style of stand-up and through co-writing and starring in hospital sitcom *Getting On* (2009-2012). Brand described herself as a 'lifelong supporter' when she endorsed Labour in a 2010 PEB (Labour Party, 2010). Labour's third 2015 broadcast, 'A decent society looks after its people', was uploaded and first shown on television on April 16th. On the Labour Party YouTube channel this has been viewed 26,650 times, in comparison with 330,300 views of Freeman's.

This focuses on health, with Brand framing the election as a choice between two drastically different ways of managing the NHS. Brand uses her experience to perform authenticity, telling the viewer she used to be a nurse and describing the NHS as her 'own personal axe to grind' (Labour Party, 2015b). By using her personal experience to underpin her values, and claiming these values motivate her endorsement, Brand performs authenticity through 'genuine' attachment to the cause (Saward, 2010: 104). Brand constructs a constituency of viewers who share her concerns, claiming on the basis of her experience to know what is in their best interests. She does this by presenting her vision of a 'decent society' but also through attributing assumed experiences to the viewer, stating 'if you've tried to get an appointment...recently you'll know, things are in a right mess'.

Brand's broadcast is more personal, as she draws on her experience as a resource to support claims to 'expertise and special credentials' (Saward, 2010: 95). She uses this to share 'what *I'm* seeing' on the NHS, sharing her experience by raising and answering rhetorical questions on behalf of the concerned citizens she constructs. This conversational tone positions Brand as someone who shares viewers' opinions: 'let's be honest about it...they're planning even more extreme cuts. *We know that*. They don't wanna talk about it, but it's not hard to guess'. Like Freeman Brand positions herself among citizens rather than as a representative of politicians, guiding viewers through her

‘personal’ motivations for ‘choosing Labour’. Brand however uses a stronger oppositional tone to construct this claim; not oppositional to politicians in general, but ‘the Tory party’ specifically. This can be seen most clearly when she tells viewers the NHS is ‘*ours*, it belongs to us all...and we want to keep it, safe in *our* hands, not *theirs*’.

5.4.2 *The Political Information Cycle around Jo Brand’s Endorsement*

As well as receiving fewer views online Brand’s endorsement attracted far less media attention. Only six news articles and three blog posts were published online in direct response, with no mention from the UK’s national newspapers. Brand otherwise became just another name in articles listing celebrity Labourites. Even Guido Fawkes (2015d) only mentioned Brand in passing in a piece attacking Miliband, his recollection that when she endorsed Labour previously they suffered ‘their worse ever defeat’ suggesting her support was nothing for opponents to worry about. The only contestation of Brand’s claims came a libertarian blogger, who accused her of ‘self-interest’ as a former NHS employee and argued this experience did not ‘establish credibility’ (Hooper, 2015). The remaining articles simply reported that Brand had appeared in a Labour PEB and noted that she used to be a nurse, without speculating what benefit this might bring Labour. Twitter responses to Brand’s endorsement demonstrate that the lack of attention paid to it was, in and of itself, a barrier to recognition as a political representative.

5.4.3 *Twitter Responses to Jo Brand*

Table 5.9. Tone of tweets toward Jo Brand (percentages)

Variable	Negative	Neutral	Positive
G1 Tone of tweet toward endorsement	45.5	27.5	27.0

As Brand received less media coverage than other celebrities, the smaller response on Twitter is unsurprising. What *is* surprising is that Brand received the highest proportion of negative responses. As Table 5.9 above shows 45.5% of responses were negative and only 27% positive. This is in spite of her use of personal experience to perform

authenticity, greater consistency of performances across fields, *and* a lack of negative interventions from journalists to contest her claims. Brand’s endorsement was evaluated differently in two key ways. Firstly, her inability to accumulate celebrity capital through her intervention reinforced a view her endorsement held little-to-no strategic benefit for Labour. Brand herself was also evaluated differently; responses were more likely to make judgements whether positive or negative, with negative judgements frequently personal and misogynistic.

Table 5.10. Percentage of tweets speculating on Jo Brand’s strategic impact

Variable	Negative	Positive
G8 Strategy Response	3.6	1.7

As Table 5.10 above shows, a higher proportion of responses speculated Brand’s endorsement would have a negative impact on Labour’s campaign (3.6%) than positive (1.7%). Negative responses suggested Brand’s endorsement was not politically valuable due to perceptions she is not popular, and Labour were therefore ‘scraping the barrel’ of celebrity support. 19.5% of responses described feeling less positively about Labour, far outweighing other endorsers. Criticism was both more frequent and more personal, with Table 5.11 below showing 19.3% of responses described feeling less positively about Brand. Negative responses were often expressed in personal terms, the low strategic value of her endorsement connected to a low opinion of Brand as a comedian.

Table 5.11. Sentiment change in responses to Jo Brand

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
G2 More positive about party	6.3
G3 Less positive about party	19.5
G4 More positive about celebrity	14.5
G5 Less positive about celebrity	19.3

Brand was not simply judged more negatively but more frequently, with responses more likely to report feeling more *or* less positively toward Brand *or* Labour than for other celebrities. Positive responses often related to Brand’s focus on healthcare, with

Labour-supporting NHS workers responding enthusiastically. This small, narrow constituency demonstrated overt acceptance of Brand's representative claims by praising her for 'speaking sense' and 'knowing what she is talking about'. Positive tweets often also included #VoteLabour and hashtags in support of the NHS. While Brand received enthusiastic backing from a small number of Labour supporters, her intervention did not generate the excitement initially precipitated by an unexpected endorsement from a Hollywood star. Brand's consistent support for Labour was not rewarded as inconsistency is punished; as Table 5.13 shows this was noted in only 1% of responses.

Table 5.12. Perceptions of (in)authenticity in responses to Jo Brand

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
P21 Contesting performance of authenticity	4.3
P22 Accepting/supporting performance of authenticity	4.3

Brand's use of personal resources failed to elicit a greater overt acceptance of claims to understand citizens' interests, with Table 5.12 above showing her performance of authenticity was contested and accepted in equal measure (4.3% of tweets). Brand's endorsement was contested the least on the grounds of wealth, though the appearance of this in 2.2% of responses suggests accusations of 'champagne socialism' are an inevitable consequence of celebrity support for left-wing parties. 5.8% of responses noted consistency between the endorsement and Brand's experience as a nurse, however Table 5.13 below also shows her current career as a comedian was used as grounds for contestation in 3.4%. The sense expressed in this small number of tweets that Labour's use of comedians was a 'desperate' tactic grew as they received further support from comics. This supports Arthurs and Little's (2016) argument that comedy is seen as 'low status' in the hierarchies of genre discussed in Chapter 3, with implications for the exchangeability of comedians' celebrity capital for political capital.

Table 5.13. Markers of (in)authenticity in responses to Jo Brand

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
M10 Consistency – previous political statements/actions	0.7
M11 Inconsistency – previous political statements actions	0.0
M12 Inconsistency – wealth	2.2
M13 Accusation of tax avoidance	0.0
M14 Inconsistency – moral judgement	1.0
M15 Consistency – career and endorsement	5.8
M16 Inconsistency – career and endorsement	3.4
M17 Accusation of self-interest	1.9
M18 Other marker of consistency	0.0
M19 Other marker of inconsistency	1.2
M20 Response is misogynistic or critical of endorser's appearance	6.3

Brand was most frequently dismissed however through references to weight or age, and misogynistic language (6.3% of responses). Brand was evaluated on different terms to Labour's male supporters, suggesting Inthorn and Street's (2011: 483) finding that 'successful politicians' are perceived as masculine extends to all those seeking political capital. Table 5.14 below shows an interesting consequence of the low media interest in Brand; with a higher proportion of responses reporting seeing her PEB on television (20%), responses were also more likely to reference its content (37.3%). This greater focus on content and a lack of negative media coverage reiterates that other factors were at play in the evaluation of Brand's representative claims.

Table 5.14. Sources referenced in responses to Jo Brand

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
S1 Link to news article or blog	20.0
S2 Link to endorsement	18.3
S3 PEB seen on TV	37.3
S4 Endorsement seen on other source	0.0
G9 References content of endorsement	33.5

Brand was evaluated more critically than Freeman, facing greater barriers to political capital due to normative perceptions of who belongs in the political field. However the greatest barrier to acceptance and exchange was the *lack* of celebrity capital

accumulated through Brand's intervention. Her endorsement was consequently perceived as of little-to-no value to the party to which she had a stronger connection than other celebrities. Where Brand's endorsement was considered noteworthy, this was often in tweets simply mentioning her name among a list of celebrities supporting Labour. This trend was of greater benefit to Steve Coogan, who intervened in the final days of the campaign. Coogan received a more positive response on Twitter than Jo Brand, in spite of contestation from both journalists and citizens of his tongue-in-cheek claims to be an 'ordinary bloke'.

5.5 Case 3: Steve Coogan

5.5.1 Coogan's PEB: Ordinary Childhood, 'Ordinary Bloke'

Comedian and actor Steve Coogan is best known for portraying Alan Partridge, a tactless local radio DJ with a large ego and parochial worldview, on British television and film. Tabloids have also regularly published stories about his relationships, addiction, and penchant for expensive cars. He has become a prominent advocate for press regulation, giving evidence to the Leveson inquiry in 2011 following the News International phone hacking scandal and winning damages from Mirror Group (Ruddick, 2017). Coogan endorsed Labour in their final English PEB, uploaded on May 3rd and viewed 113,700 times on the party's YouTube channel. While Freeman and Brand's PEB were filmed in a studio, affording the viewer a glimpse 'behind the scenes', Coogan makes his case from a café before walking along the Brighton seafront close to his home.

Coogan constructs the most explicit performances of authenticity, using humour to negotiate the tension between his lifestyle and claims to understand 'ordinary' citizens. Coogan tells viewers he's 'in an ordinary caf', having an ordinary cup of tea, because I'm an ordinary bloke', before a voice off-camera shouts 'sorry, we couldn't do a skinny soya latte Steve'. Pulling a face of mock embarrassment, Coogan demonstrates the

‘genuineness’ of his endorsement by motivating it through values situated in childhood memories (Saward, 2010: 104). Coogan tells the viewer that growing up in Manchester his parents fostered children, because ‘for us it wasn’t just about looking after number one’ (Labour Party, 2015c). These stories allow Coogan to negotiate claims to represent viewers in spite of the economic and celebrity capital he has since accumulated, claiming while he’s ‘been lucky, I’m successful and quite comfortably off’ he’s ‘never forgotten the values they gave me’.

Coogan also performs authenticity by constructing ‘independence’ from the party by positioning himself among citizens (Saward: 2010: 104). He uses patriotism to align himself with ‘the British people’, claiming they share a ‘sense of fairness’ and ‘when *we* see the Conservatives helping their rich friends... *we know* that’s not fair’. He builds on claims to understand viewers’ interests by asking them to join him in picturing scenarios: ‘imagine how *we’ll feel* if *we* wake up on Friday with another five years of the Tories in Downing Street...’. It is from this constructed shared perspective that Coogan makes his appeal.

Coming in the final week of a ‘knife edge’ campaign (Labour Party, 2015c), with polls inaccurately predicting narrow-to-no margin between Labour and the Conservatives (Grice, 2015), Coogan’s broadcast is driven by a greater sense of urgency. This creates a subtle yet significant difference in how he constructs representative claims. Freeman and Brand constructed shared interests and tell the viewer they *personally* will vote Labour on these grounds. Coogan makes an explicit claim to know what is in citizens’ best interests, claiming Labour will provide a ‘better future for *our* kids’ and stand ‘up for *everyone*’ if they ‘go out and vote for it’. While claiming independence Coogan vouches for Labour more explicitly, telling viewers ‘I trust Labour with the NHS, I know they’ll take care of it’. The broadcast ends with Coogan imploring viewers to ‘vote Labour this Thursday’.

5.5.2 *The Political Information Cycle around Coogan's Endorsement*

Between May 3rd and May 7th (Election Day), 25 articles and blog posts were published online and Coogan was interviewed on television news twice. These interviews allowed Coogan, who does not use social media, to re-make claims to authentically represent citizens' interests. Contestation of Coogan's claims frequently noted his wealth, with the *Yorkshire Post* (2015) dismissing 'high-earning, privileged' celebrities. Piers Morgan (2015) directly contested Coogan's attempts to perform authenticity, calling his claims to be an 'ordinary bloke' 'beyond parody'. Dismissing Coogan as 'about as socialist as Floyd Mayweather', Morgan's piece (which attracted 1,800 comments and 4,000 shares) recited a tale of Coogan ordering a 'topless model lover' to lie on a bed covered in '£5,000 in used £10 notes'. Guido Fawkes (2015e) intervened to undermine a Labour endorser once again, dismissing Coogan as a 'coke and hookers fan', while *The Telegraph* noted his enjoyment of 'sports cars' alongside 'reports of drug use and infidelity' (Turner and Holehouse, 2015). It was therefore not simply Coogan's wealth but more importantly his behaviour used to contest his self-professed community values.

Morgan's (2015) rhetorical question of whether 'we' should let 'hypocritical clowns like Brand and Coogan tell us how to vote' shows Coogan's career was also used to contest his credibility. This was reinforced by Russell Brand's intervention shortly after Coogan's, and efforts by Conservative politicians to dismiss them as trivial. Following Cameron's dismissal of Russell Brand as 'a joke', Conservative Party Chair Grant Shapps disparaged the 'bunch of comedians' that had 'fittingly' stepped in for 'the hapless Ed Miliband on Labour Party broadcasts' (Turner and Holehouse, 2015). Coogan's authenticity was also contested through accusations that he was motivated by self-interest rather than shared values, due to a 'self-seeking' desire for attention or 'self-protecting' support for press regulation (Fawkes, 2015e; Gray, 2015; Morgan, 2015; Turner and Holehouse, 2015; Yorkshire Post, 2015). Years of tabloid revelations - leaving Coogan's

‘closet empty of skeletons’ - provided a multitude of stories for Conservative-supporting journalists to contest his credibility (Milmo and Cusick, 2011). Unlike Freeman these stories did not dominate the political information cycle as a whole; most articles simply reported his endorsement without passing judgement.

While Coogan’s celebrity capital was not portrayed as a significant asset for Labour as Freeman’s had (temporarily) been, he did receive positive coverage accepting his performance of authenticity. *The Guardian* responded positively to Coogan ‘poking fun at’ himself by claiming to resemble ‘ordinary voters’ (Mason, 2015). This was one of four pieces reporting Coogan’s emphasis on his childhood and values (Kirby, 2015; Mason, 2015), with two also positively reporting his anti-phone hacking activism (Malta Today, 2015; Nianias, 2015). This focus on family precipitated an intriguing line of inquiry, as *Manchester Evening News* reported that Coogan’s father was a ‘long-serving Lib Dem campaigner’ and Coogan had ‘floated’ between parties (Fitzgerald, 2015). While concluding ‘any ambiguity about Coogan’s allegiances’ had now been cast aside, any hint of political inconsistency therefore appears to attract attention.

Coogan’s interviews for *ITV News London* and *Channel 4 News* afforded opportunities to challenge contestation. Re-making claims to support Labour for ‘the good of the community as a whole’ rather than ‘my own narrow self-interest’, he argued ‘there’s nothing in it for me’ (Channel 4 News, 2015b; ITV report, 2015). Coogan’s responses to dismissal of Labour’s ‘bunch of comedians’ give interesting insight into what he hoped his intervention could achieve. Coogan argued ‘we have a very unbalanced debate...the reason people like me get involved is to try to redress that balance’, revealing an assumption celebrities can attract positive media attention (Channel 4 News, 2015b). Coogan suggested Russell Brand’s endorsement was valuable due to his large Twitter following, arguing he resonates with ‘a lot of young people’ the Conservatives did not

(ITV report, 2015). The Conservatives, Coogan concludes, would not dismiss celebrity as a ‘desperation measure’ if they had celebrity support.

Coogan demonstrates that those with sufficient celebrity capital can indeed attract coverage, but this does not bring ‘balance’. Responses to his endorsement followed the political information cycle in deeming his inappropriate behaviour and comedic background to be insufficiently serious to be taken seriously. I find a more positive response to Coogan however than those who intervened before him, demonstrating the importance of celebrity capital but also of context.

5.5.3 Twitter Responses to Coogan

Table 5.15. Tone of tweets toward Coogan (percentages)

Variable	Negative	Neutral	Positive
G1 Tone of tweet toward endorsement	29.8	36.8	33.5

The sense of urgency in Coogan’s PEB as polling approached can also be seen in Twitter responses. While several factors were used to ‘read back’ Coogan’s claims, his was the only endorsement to receive a greater proportion of positive responses (33.5%) than negative (29.8%, see Table 5.15 above). Coogan’s endorsement reinforced a sense of momentum for Labour activists, who added Coogan to a growing list of celebrity supporters as they encouraged others to join their ‘team’.

Table 5.16. Sentiment change in responses to Coogan

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
G2 More positive about party	3.1
G3 Less positive about party	4.3
G4 More positive about celebrity	4.6
G5 Less positive about celebrity	5.1

The importance of context can also be seen in negative responses, as dismissal of Labour as a ‘bunch of comedians’ grew (Turner and Holehouse, 2015). Table 5.16 above shows while responses were more balanced for Coogan, people were still more likely to

report feeling *less positively* toward the party (4.3%) than more (3.1%), and *less positively* toward Coogan (5.1%) than more (4.6%). Coogan's greater demonstrated ability to accumulate celebrity capital meant however that his endorsement was perceived as more valuable than Jo Brand's. Table 5.17 below shows that in spite of backlash, responses were more likely to state his endorsement would have a positive impact on Labour's campaign (4.2%) than negative (2.2%).

Table 5.17. Percentage of tweets speculating on Coogan's strategic impact

Variable	Negative	Positive
G8 Strategy Response	2.2	4.2

Table 5.18. Perceptions of (in)authenticity in responses to Coogan

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
P21 Contesting performance of authenticity	5.1
P22 Accepting/supporting performance of authenticity	4.9

Positive responses often came from Labour supporters who shared Coogan's broadcast to encourage others, and express excitement as the party gained ground in the polls. While not described as a 'coup' as Freeman's had been, the judgement it was 'good' or 'impressive' to have Coogan's support was underpinned by an assumption his celebrity capital was strategically valuable. Coogan became one of the 'good' celebrities who had backed Labour in contrast with 'bad' Conservatives. This added to a sense of momentum among supporters, who praised Coogan for sharing the 'right' message and not 'forgetting his roots'. Table 5.18 above shows, however, that Coogan's performance of authenticity was contested (5.1%) as often as it was accepted (4.9%).

Table 5.19. Markers of (in)authenticity in responses to Coogan

Variable	Present
M10 Consistency – previous political statements/actions	0.4
M11 Inconsistency – previous political statements actions	0.0
M12 Inconsistency – wealth	4.8
M13 Accusation of tax avoidance	0.2

M14 Inconsistency – moral judgement	3.9
M15 Consistency – career and endorsement	0
M16 Inconsistency – career and endorsement	5.5
M17 Accusation of self-interest	2.7
M18 Other marker of consistency	0.1
M19 Other marker of inconsistency	1.4
M20 Response is misogynistic or critical of endorser's appearance	0.0

The factors used to 'read back' Coogan's endorsement reveal interesting perceptions of who is a suitable political representative. Contestation of Coogan's credibility based on wealth (4.9%) was often combined with a stronger, more personal objection to his character and behaviour. Table 5.19 above shows 3.9% of responses contested Coogan's intervention on moral grounds, questioning his qualification to give advice on the basis of perceived moral failings. Stories of infidelity and drug addiction were used to suggest Labour were courting the 'wrong' kind of support. Coogan received the most contestation on the basis of his career, with 5.5% of responses questioning whether a comedian is someone voters should listen to. Following media coverage Coogan was also the celebrity most frequently accused of acting in self-interest (2.7%), rather than the interests of citizens as he repeatedly claimed.

Table 5.20. Sources referenced in responses to Coogan

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
S1 Link to news article or blog	28.0
S2 Link to endorsement	26.4
S3 PEB seen on TV	8.5
S4 Endorsement seen on other source	1.1

The influence of the political information cycle can also be seen in accusations of inappropriate behaviour. While a greater proportion of responses to Coogan shared the YouTube video of his PEB as part of a final campaign push (26.4%), Table 5.20 above shows a greater proportion of responses linked to an article (28%). However only 2.9% of tweets lent overt support to critics such as Guido Fawkes or Piers Morgan, with Table 5.21 below showing almost as many contested their negative interventions (2.6%).

Coogan's case demonstrates celebrities are evaluated within the broader context of campaigns; negative responses often mentioned the 'Ed Stone', a widely mocked two-tonne slab inscribed with policy pledges unveiled by Miliband five days before the election. While the 'Ed Stone' was mocked as something Coogan's comically inept character Alan Partridge might produce, Partridge quote 'back of the net!' was used by Labour supporters to celebrate 'winning' Coogan's endorsement. The meanings and performances Coogan brought from the field of entertainment therefore influenced evaluations (McCracken, 1989; Ribke, 2015), but were used to both commend and criticise.

Table 5.21. Perceptions of (in)authenticity in responses to Coogan

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
P23 Contesting accusation of inauthenticity	2.6
P24 Accepting/supporting accusation of inauthenticity	2.9

Coogan's endorsement was often mentioned alongside 'Milibrand', either as a positive display of the celebrities supporting Labour or a dismissal of these celebrities as immoral or unserious. Evaluations of Russell Brand were also often situated within broader campaign debates over who party leaders were, or were not, speaking to. While Brand like Coogan was criticised for 'bad behaviour', his higher celebrity capital and large social media audience meant his endorsement was evaluated less on personal grounds than as a 'strategic gamble'.

5.6 Case 4: Russell Brand

Russell Brand is well known not only as a comedian, but for his relationships and recovery from addiction. His ability to attract attention was evident in Chapter 4, as was his antagonistic relationship with a tabloid press that paid close attention to his fortune and revelled in his misfortunes. Of all Labour's endorsers Brand is also the best known for interventions in the political field. In an interview with Jeremy Paxman for *Newsnight*

in October 2013, viewed on YouTube over 11 million times, Brand revealed he had never voted (BBC Newsnight, 2013). Brand was both the most discussed in mainstream media and the only endorser with a large social media following. As of January 2016 Brand had 1.2 million YouTube subscribers, 11.4 million Twitter followers, and 3.5 million Facebook fans. This was used to justify Miliband's decision to meet Brand, aiming to reach citizens outside the 'empty stadium' of the mainstream campaign (BBC News, 2015a). Having seen how Brand previously used populist opposition between 'the people' and politicians as a resource, I now examine how Brand negotiated claims as he told viewers they 'gotta vote Labour' (Russell Brand, 2015d).

5.6.1 'Milibrand': Holding Miliband Accountable to 'Normal People'

On April 29th 'Milibrand: The Interview' was uploaded to Russell Brand's (2015b) YouTube channel, where it has been viewed 1.4 million times. On May 4th, three days before polling day, Brand uploaded 'Emergency: VOTE To Start Revolution' (Russell Brand, 2015d). Here Brand showed the footage he 'found most encouraging', telling viewers they 'gotta vote Labour'. On Brand's YouTube channel alone this was viewed over 850,000 times. Brand subsequently intervened in the political information cycle around 'Milibrand' to re-make claims to represent viewers, in response to accusations he had 'U-turned'. Here he revealed, contrary to the impression given in the interview, he had 'decided to endorse Labour before we approached them' (Russell Brand 2015f).

In both videos Brand is shown interviewing Miliband in his kitchen before speaking directly to viewers from his bed. On his own platform, Brand makes stronger claims to represent viewers' interests and stronger commands that they vote Labour. He holds Miliband to account on behalf of this constituency by asking Miliband what he 'as a politician' will do to 'take on powerful forces' (Russell Brand, 2015b). He then vouches for Miliband's ability to represent viewers, claiming 'what's important is that this bloke will be in parliament, and I think *this bloke will listen to us*' (Russell Brand, 2015d). By

putting views claimed to be those of ‘normal people’ to Miliband, then telling viewers that Miliband ‘understands’ them, Brand acts as a broker between the two. Agreement between Miliband and Brand becomes agreement between Miliband and citizens, as Brand tells Miliband that *if* he forms the government he has just described ‘*then* I think *we*’ve got something worth voting for’. Miliband responds by extending his hand, which Brand, sheepishly, shakes.

Brand makes claims not only to speak on behalf of *Trews* viewers, but also ‘the people of Britain’ more broadly. Table 5.22 below shows every group Brand claimed to speak for or positioned himself among, and every group or individual these constituencies are constructed in opposition to.

Table 5.22. Groups Russell Brand claimed to speak for/against during ‘Milibrand’

Groups Brand claimed to speak for/positioned himself among	Groups/individuals Brand positioned himself and ‘the people’ against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘All of us’ (producers and viewers of <i>The Trews</i>) • ‘For me, and for a lot of people who don’t vote’ • ‘The disengaged and the disenfranchised’ • ‘The people’ • ‘Us ordinary people’ • ‘People want...’ • ‘Normal people’ • ‘We want...’ • ‘What the people of Britain need is...’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘(Unelected) powerful elites’ • ‘Powerful organisations’ • ‘Bankers’/ ‘the financial industry’ • ‘The richest 1% and beyond’ • ‘(Transnational) corporations’/ ‘big business’ • ‘Super-elites’ • ‘Politics’ • ‘You’ (Ed Miliband) ‘as a politician’ • ‘Powerful forces’ • ‘Rupert Murdoch’ • ‘The Tory Party’/ ‘The Conservative Party’ • ‘David Cameron’

Sources: Russell Brand (2015b; 2015d)

Brand positions himself among the ‘ordinary people’ he claims to represent, prefacing questions with phrases like ‘a lot of *us* feel that’. Though intervening in an election Brand continued to construct this constituency in opposition to politicians,

positioning himself as representative of ‘people’ in opposition to ‘politics’ represented by Miliband. Gesturing between Miliband and himself, Brand argued ‘politics and people have to work in harmony’, before bringing his hands to his chest to claim ‘the *people* have made their disillusionment clear’. Also constructing ‘the people’ in opposition to ‘powerful organisations’, Brand asks Miliband which he would represent as Prime Minister.

Contrasting this case with Brand’s claims to represent a grassroots housing campaign in Chapter 4, Brand performed authenticity through greater ‘independence’ from political structures even as ‘politics’ sat - invited - in his kitchen. Brand did not draw on class-based resources, or expend effort to negotiate his wealth. This may be explained by the broader constituency constructed, as in Chapter 4 broad claims to represent ‘the people’ contained the narrower constituency of New Era residents. The key difference may be however that Brand perceived the greatest potential source of contestation to be his previous comments about voting. He negotiated this by reframing these comments, crafting a consistent narrative from the Paxman interview through to future plans to ‘amplify’ community-led campaigns (Russell Brand, 2015d). Brand argued while he had become known as ‘Mr Don’t Vote’ what he ‘actually’ meant was ‘politics isn’t something we can just be involved in once every five years’. Brand also attempted to limit ‘reading back’ by placing conditions on his claim, upholding a recent endorsement of Green candidate Caroline Lucas and telling viewers that ‘if you’re Scottish, you don’t need an English person telling you what to do’.

This did not mark the end of Brand’s efforts to craft a consistent political narrative, intervening in the political information cycle in response to accusations of ‘U-turning’. As Figure 5.1 below demonstrates, these efforts to justify the endorsement did not attract the same media attention as the endorsement itself. Nor did they influence evaluations, in

a political information cycle that became debate over whether Brand represented an audience of young prospective Labour voters.

5.6.2 The Political Information Cycle around 'Milibrand'

Figure 5.1. Articles published about 'Milibrand' between April 27 and 7 May 2015

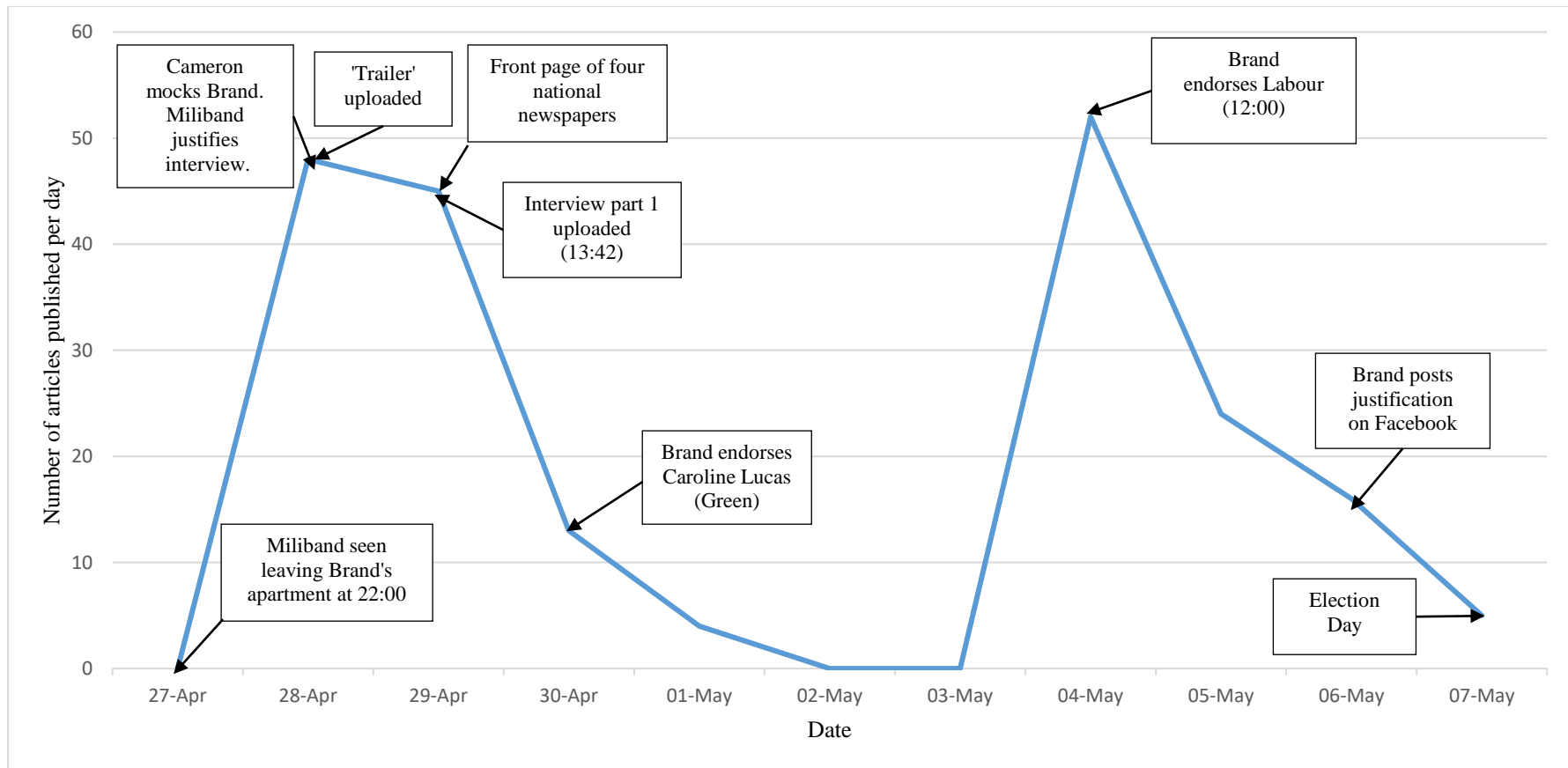


Figure 5.1 above shows the scale of coverage between April 27th, when Miliband was seen leaving Brand's apartment, and polling day on May 7th. This includes 203 online news articles from local, national, international and entertainment news, and coverage on the front page of four national newspapers. Brand was also the only endorser discussed frequently on television news.¹⁰ Figure 5.1 does not include coverage of Brand's endorsement of Green Party candidate Caroline Lucas, uploaded on April 30 (Russell Brand, 2015c), meaning he was never absent from coverage in the campaign's final week.

The scale of media interest in 'Milibrand' was further testament to Brand's ability to rapidly accumulate celebrity capital. As Brand was again contested by the tabloid press, defence was based almost solely on the premise this capital and his large social media audience meant Brand could reach potential voters politicians could not. While Arthurs and Little (2016: 108) are right to argue media response to 'Milibrand' was 'mixed', response to the interview and to the endorsement specifically should not be conflated. Following the endorsement, coverage of Brand's alleged 'U-turn' demonstrated he was no longer assumed to represent the social media audience which had lent his celebrity capital political value.

After Miliband was seen leaving Brand's flat, coverage swiftly converged around argument between politicians. At a campaign visit to a factory Cameron argued its employees were 'more important' 'real people', meaning he 'hadn't got time' to 'hang out with Russell Brand' whom he dismissed as 'a joke' (The Guardian, 2015). Arguing the election was 'not funny', Cameron suggested Brand did not represent 'real people' and by taking him seriously Miliband was not taking politics seriously.

¹⁰ Between April 28 and May 7 'Milibrand' was discussed in a total of 14 editions of the following programmes (collectively): *BBC News at Ten*, *Newsnight*, *ITV News at Ten*, *Channel 4 News*, and *Radio 4's Today*. These sources are listed with online news coverage in Appendix B.

Brand's tabloid sparring partners again contested his intervention, but this time focused front-page coverage more on stories of 'inappropriate' behaviour than wealth. Scandals and stories of drug and alcohol addiction were used to support Cameron's dismissal, 'Sachsgate' becoming 'evidence' Brand lacked the credibility to command an audience with political leaders. The *Daily Mail* used language usually reserved for commemorating the First World War ('lest we forget') to remember Brand leaving 'lewd messages on former Fawlty Towers star Andrew Sachs' answering machine' (Doyle, 2015b; Schofield, 2015a: 5). While Toby Young (2015) lamented the 'yawning chasm' between Brand's 'extravagant lifestyle and the left-wing values he professes to believe in', 'inappropriate' conduct was most frequently given as evidence he did not belong among political elites (Letts, 2015b; McTague and Chorley, 2015). This impression of Brand as an outsider was reinforced by journalists mocking 'mockney' Miliband for not only for speaking *to* Brand but speaking *like* Brand, glottal stops and all (Kirkup, 2015a; Letts, 2015a).

The majority of articles published about the interview were less focused on Brand than on its potential strategic implications. *The Guardian's* Stuart Heritage (2015) judged an endorsement would mean 'career suicide' for Brand, as 'the people who'd previously sided with him will feel betrayed'. The perception a large number of people 'sided' with Brand due to social media metrics was more frequently used at this stage, however, to argue 'Milibrand' could hold strategic benefits for Labour.

Backlash against Cameron's dismissal of the interview was driven by Miliband's justification. He claimed a 'duty' to persuade people who 'did not believe the political system made a difference', and reach those outside the 'empty stadium' of the mainstream campaign (BBC News, 2015a). Labour's Ed Balls told *Channel 4 News* (2015a) it would 'get more people engaged in politics', reporter Gary Gibbon speculating an endorsement could gain 'the sort of voters' who might 'go off to the Greens'. Balls countered John

Humphrys' accusation on Radio 4's *Today* (2015) it was 'a bit demeaning' by referencing Brand's 'million YouTube watchers', arguing if the interview 'helps us get that message out, so be it'. Brand's celebrity capital was therefore a means to an end, a campaign asset based on the assumption he represented voters Labour found hard to reach.

Owen Jones (2015) called on 'smug' critics to 'stop sneering', arguing Brand was Miliband's 'best route to young voters'. Jones' piece, shared almost 6,000 times, was alone in defending Brand on personal as well as strategic grounds. *The Guardian's* front-page coverage framed the interview as 'Miliband's tactical gamble' (Wintour, 2015b), a 'risk worth taking' *if* it helped Miliband mobilise younger voters (Wintour, 2015a). This strategic framing meant some who rejected Brand's political credibility supported Miliband's decision to meet him. *The Mirror's* Fleet Street Fox (2015) dismissed Brand as a 'mono-talented idiot', but framed the interview as Miliband's effort to 'access' 'young and disengaged' citizens who 'aren't paying the least attention' to mainstream news. In Conservative-supporting broadsheet *The Telegraph* Kirkup (2015a) agreed Brand was a 'joke', but argued what 'really matters' is that Miliband had tried to engage the 'real people who might see the interview'.

This continued after the interview was uploaded. *BBC News at Ten* (2015) declared Brand 'reaches the parts that politicians can't', meaning the interview was 'perhaps a gamble, but any extra votes will mean it's worth it'. High viewing figures and media coverage led some to declare Miliband's 'risk' or 'gamble' had 'paid off' (Erlanger, 2015; Khomami, 2015; Kirkup, 2015b; Williamson, 2015). With Brand's political capital tied almost exclusively to claims to represent *Trews* viewers, the political information cycle shifted as accusations of a 'U-turn' disrupted acceptance of these claims.

ITV News at Ten (2015) announced that Brand, 'self-appointed leader of the "don't vote" revolution', had 'risked the wrath of social media by changing his mind'.

Brand's efforts to reframe past comments as consistent had worse-than-no effect on the political information cycle. Having described his past image as 'Mr Don't Vote' in order to explain his 'actual' views, this label was used to describe Brand in most endorsement coverage. Debate became whether the endorsement was a 'backfired' bid for support (Schofield, 2015b) or 'route to reaching a new audience' (Wigley, 2015). For Brand however coverage focused on his 'U-turn', an act those beyond his usual critics contested as 'hypocrisy' for 'embracing' the system he had 'railed against' (Batchelor, 2015; Williams, 2015).

In a long Facebook post shared 8,000 times, Brand revealed he had 'decided to endorse Labour before we approached them for the interview' (Russell Brand, 2015e). Here and in an Election Day episode of *The Trews* Brand renewed efforts to argue his 'agenda' had not changed. He negotiated the endorsement as an effort to help those who, unlike himself, lacked the economic capital to avoid the adverse effects of cuts to public services under the Conservatives (Russell Brand, 2015f). These interventions attracted little media attention, and failed to shift the political information cycle around 'Milibrand'.

5.6.3 Twitter Responses to Russell Brand

Table 5.23. Tone of tweets toward Russell Brand (percentages)

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
G1 Tone of tweet toward endorsement	26.4	60.3	13.3

Looking at Table 5.23 above, it is clear Russell Brand's claims were evaluated differently. Responses to Brand were both the least positive (13.3%) *and* the least negative (26.4%). This unusually 'neutral' response (60.3%) is connected to the uniquely high proportion of tweets linking to news articles (67.5%). Brand's intervention was evaluated as a campaign event, as people shared the surprising news and speculated over its strategic implications. Brand demonstrates the tension between perceptions of celebrity as

unserious, but of celebrity capital as holding potential political value. Brand’s high celebrity capital was rendered politically valuable by the assumption he represented his large social media audience. The debate that dominated the political information cycle also dominated evaluations on Twitter. Was Miliband ‘right’ to meet with Brand to reach citizens politicians could not, or ‘wrong’ to entertain a badly behaved entertainer in the serious business of party politics?

The extent to which acceptance of Brand was contingent on representative claims becomes clearer following the endorsement, which needs to be considered separately from the interview. Negative evaluations often accused Brand of inconsistency, contrasting the endorsement with the anti-voting views that had become his ‘established reputation’ (Arthurs and Little, 2016: 104). Brand was no longer accepted as representing the interests of young, disillusioned citizens. This ruptured the claim that had afforded him access to a part of the political field where his behaviour and background, professional and personal, were at odds with elite norms.

Table 5.24. Percentage of tweets speculating on Russell Brand’s strategic impact

	Absent	Negative	Positive
G8 Strategy Response	84.0	3.3	12.6

While Brand himself was often evaluated negatively, his intervention received the highest proportion of responses speculating a positive impact on Labour’s chances (12.6% as can be seen in Table 5.24 above). The ‘third person effects’ perception that others would be influenced by Brand due to high celebrity capital was reinforced by his social media following. The interview was seen as a ‘gamble’ that might pay off, a strategic move by Labour based on Brand’s perceived influence often positively contrasted with that of the traditional press. This may explain why responses to ‘Milibrand’ were the only ones more likely to re-evaluate opinion of politicians rather than the celebrity. Table 5.25 below shows 4.7% of responses expressed feeling more positively about Miliband or

Labour and 8.7% less positively. Positive responses credited Miliband for being ‘brave’ in this attempt to ‘reach out’ to voters.

Table 5.25. Sentiment change in responses to Russell Brand

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
G2 More positive about party	4.7
G3 Less positive about party	8.7
G4 More positive about celebrity	1.0
G5 Less positive about celebrity	3.6

Negative responses in contrast mocked Miliband for his act of ‘desperation’, responses particularly derisory where he was perceived to adopt the controversial comic’s ‘mockney’ accent. Even Brand who had so frequently positioned himself in opposition to politicians had difficulty constructing distance from Miliband in this context. Negative responses dismissed both as ‘fake’, viewing both as wealthy, middle-aged white men falsely claiming to understand ordinary people. In spite of Brand’s intervention being evaluated as the most strategically useful, his performance of authenticity was contested most frequently (7.7%) and accepted the least (0.9%, see Table 5.26 below). This again demonstrates that perceptions of Brand’s political legitimacy were based on his celebrity capital.

Table 5.26. Perceptions of (in)authenticity in responses to Russell Brand

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
P21 Contesting performance of authenticity	7.7
P22 Accepting/supporting performance of authenticity	0.9

In contrast Brand’s personal characteristics were the basis of contestation, both of his claims to represent citizens and right to receive an audience with politicians. Brand’s wealth was noted as a marker of inauthenticity in 6.8% of responses (see Table 5.27 below), but like Coogan Brand was also criticised on the basis of unbecoming behaviour. ‘Reading back’ based on moral judgements, 4.8% of responses, asked what right an ‘addict’, ‘womaniser’, and scandal-maker had to be taken seriously. The marker of

inauthenticity noted most frequently in responses to Brand - to any of the celebrities – was inconsistency with his previous political statements and actions. Brand was initially accused of inconsistency for endorsing Green candidate Caroline Lucas *after* interviewing Miliband, suggesting Miliband had ‘lost Brand already’. The vast majority of criticism came, however, after Miliband officially ‘won’ his support.

Table 5.27. Markers of (in)authenticity in responses to Russell Brand

Variable	Percentage of tweets present
M10 Consistency – previous political statements/actions	0.0
M11 Inconsistency – previous political statements actions	10.7
M12 Inconsistency – wealth	6.8
M13 Accusation of tax avoidance	0.1
M14 Inconsistency – moral judgement	4.8
M15 Consistency – career and endorsement	0.0
M16 Inconsistency – career and endorsement	0.5
M17 Accusation of self-interest	0.6
M18 Other marker of consistency	0.0
M19 Other marker of inconsistency	4.4

After Brand told *Trews* viewers they ‘gotta vote Labour’, the proportion of negative responses to his intervention increased. Some Labour supporters judged that Miliband’s gamble had ‘paid off’, demonstrating continued acceptance of Brand’s claims by referring to his ‘millions of followers’. Negative responses no longer accepted that Brand represented this audience. Brand was accused of hypocrisy, ‘selling out’ his ‘revolutionary’ principles and losing credibility. Some condemned Brand for apparently changing his mind ‘so easily’, expressing scepticism that this ‘U-turn’ was genuine. When Brand intervened in the political information cycle to justify his decision, explaining he had made it *before* interviewing Miliband, this aggravated rather than alleviated accusations of inconsistency. Of the 4.4% of responses noting an ‘other’ marker of inauthenticity, this admission was the second most common. The most common, accusations of misogyny, is one of several examples of Twitter responses following the political information cycle. All but three of these 111 tweets linked to the same *Daily*

Mail article, where Brand’s former girlfriend called Miliband a ‘fool’ for ‘getting into bed with him’ (Gallagher, 2015).

Table 5.28. Sources referenced in responses to Russell Brand

Variable	Percentage of tweet present
S1 Link to news article or blog	67.5
S2 Link to <i>The Trews</i>	7.2
S4 Endorsement seen on other source	3.3

It is impossible to separate Twitter responses to ‘Milibrand’ from the political information cycle. As Table 5.28 above shows, 67.5% of responses linked to a news article or blog post; this did not exceed 28% for other endorsers. Evaluations were also shaped by broader campaign narratives, with perceptions of the interview as strategically valuable and Miliband as ‘brave’ coming in the context of a ‘cautious’ campaign. Cameron in particular had been accused of avoiding ordinary people, tough questions, and debate with his opponent (Di Stefano, 2015).

The use of debates around ‘Milibrand’ to criticise Cameron explains a further apparent paradox. Responses to Brand were the least positive, but by far most likely to contest an accusation of inauthenticity made against him (14% as Table 5.29 below shows). Contestation of Cameron’s ‘joke’ jibe was generally *not* defence of Brand personally, people distancing themselves from Brand while perceiving political value in his high celebrity capital. In spite of his media resources, Brand was unable to influence the political information cycle as he repeatedly intervened to re-make claims to represent citizens’ interests.

Table 5.29. Perceptions of (in)authenticity in responses to Russell Brand

Variable	Present
P23 Contesting accusation of inauthenticity	14.0
P24 Accepting/supporting accusation of inauthenticity	7.9

Brand's perceived legitimacy in the formal political field was contingent on his high celebrity capital, the political value of this capital based on acceptance of his claim to reach and represent a large audience of disengaged citizens. This was clear after Brand endorsed Labour. No longer broadly accepted as representing the interests of this audience, Brand was unable to exchange celebrity capital for political capital in this context. While Brand's class trajectory, behaviour and background in the field of entertainment were used to contest his intervention, in the strategic framing of 'Milibrand' his celebrity capital afforded a somewhat begrudging acceptance. If he could 'help us get that message out', Ed Balls argued, '*so be it*' (Today, 2015). While Brand's intervention and evaluation were unique, this perception of celebrity capital as a means to an end in formal politics can be seen throughout this chapter.

5.7 Discussion

5.7.1 Celebrity Endorsements as Performances of Authenticity

Martin Freeman's case in particular demonstrates the fragility of celebrity claims in election campaigns, the high celebrity capital initially rendering his endorsement a 'coup' swiftly undermined by accusations of tax avoidance. Representative claims are however a fundamental element of celebrity endorsements, as the celebrity seeks to justify their presence in the political field. Constructing claims is a more complex task in an election campaign than in the grassroots context studied in Chapter 4. Celebrities attempted to negotiate tensions in claiming to represent citizens while *also* speaking on behalf of politicians through 'performances of authenticity'. These shared two common characteristics. Celebrities firstly presented claims as 'genuine' by framing their motivations for endorsing Labour within personal 'values' (Inthorn and Street, 2011; Loader et al., 2016). Secondly they positioned themselves among a constituency of citizens purported to share these values, in order to construct distance from politicians and exert 'independence' (Saward, 2010: 107).

Through these performances of authenticity, celebrities acknowledged scepticism over their credibility. What gave them the right, as one *Gogglebox* (2015) participant put it in explicit terms, to give political advice? Celebrities who fronted PEB approached them with caution, presenting endorsements as a ‘personal’ decision motivated by values and claiming to share these values with the viewer. This framed endorsements as advice from one citizen to another rather than an order given by a privileged celebrity or, worse, given by a politician *through* a celebrity. Freeman and Coogan’s efforts to situate their political values in an ‘ordinary’ childhood, while acknowledging the economic capital they have since accumulated, demonstrate the difficulty of constructing celebrity claims based on ‘descriptive similarity’ to citizens (Saward, 2010: 100).

Russell Brand made far more explicit commands to viewers to ‘vote Labour’, positioning himself as a broker between ‘ordinary people’ and political elites. Though Brand made populist claims in closest physical proximity to politicians, unlike other celebrities the endorsement took place on his own territory. This was literal, the interview filmed in his kitchen, but more importantly symbolic as Brand performed claims on his own social media platforms. This set of social media metrics, easily comparable with politicians and media organisations, became a key aspect of how Brand’s unexpected intervention was evaluated.

5.7.2 Evaluating Endorsements in Political Information Cycles

These cases demonstrate that in a hybrid media system, political information cycles are an inseparable element of the process of claim-making and evaluation. Endorsements first published on YouTube often reached Twitter users in different forms, through other sources. While Miliband met with Brand to reach outside the ‘empty stadium’ (BBC News, 2015a), endorsements were evaluated in context of the broader campaign. At least 20% of responses on Twitter linked to news articles or blog posts in each case, rising to 67.5% in responses to Russell Brand which followed a political information cycle

dominated by elite arguments. The swift intervention of Guido Fawkes to label Martin Freeman a wealthy tax-avoider not only dominated subsequent coverage but influenced responses on Twitter, undermining his efforts to negotiate belonging to the ‘privileged few’ (Labour Party, 2015a).

Coogan was unable to achieve the ‘more balanced debate’ that motivated his intervention (Channel 4 News, 2015b), as ‘champagne socialists’ with mediated misdemeanours were easy targets for Conservative-supporting media. Comparison across endorsements demonstrates an interesting tension; while celebrities often attract negative coverage, media attention is a *necessary* element of exchanging celebrity capital for political capital. This can be seen in responses to Jo Brand, dismissive on the basis of perceived unpopularity and a sense her endorsement held little strategic value. For Russell Brand in contrast, a lack of positive responses did not prevent his intervention being perceived as the most strategically valuable on the basis of assumed ‘reach’.

While celebrities were evaluated differently, combined they provide further evidence over the key factors influencing the process of claim-making and exchange. Economic capital was noted as a marker of inauthenticity in responses to all celebrities as they endorsed a centre-left party, with wealth complicating celebrity claims to be one of ‘us’ rather than one of ‘them’ (Štechová and Hájek, 2015). In this more formal political context however, in contrast with the grassroots campaign studied in Chapter 4, judgements by journalists over celebrities’ political credibility were based less on wealth and more on how it was accumulated. While wealth makes it difficult for celebrities to position themselves among citizens rather than elites, paradoxically the greatest barriers to political capital arise where celebrities are *not* seen to conform to elite political norms.

Moral judgements centred on sex, scandal and substance abuse, with Coogan and Russell Brand’s histories as tabloid fixtures incompatible with being taken seriously. This

normative interconnection between seriousness and political credibility could also be seen in responses that perceived entertainers and particularly comedians to lack this, demonstrating evaluations are influenced by cultural as well as political hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1993; Marshall, 2014; Ribke, 2015). Responses to Jo Brand drew on even more personal characteristics, her intervention dismissed through misogynistic comments about her age and appearance. These findings support Inthorn and Street's (2011) argument that the 'ideal' political actor is perceived to be both 'serious' and 'masculine', with the cases presented in this thesis demonstrating the former gains greater weight in closer proximity to formal politics.

The greatest 'reading back' of an endorsement came however in response to inconsistency in Russell Brand's political statements, perceived by critics as a 'U-turn' at best and betrayal at worst. This supports Štechová and Hájek's (2015) finding that 'turncoats' provoke a negative response, though the vitriol directed at lifelong Labour supporter Jo Brand suggests consistency is rarely rewarded. While demonstrating an ability to accumulate celebrity capital is necessary to exchanging this for political capital, the representative claims which enable this remain vulnerable to 'reading back' (Saward, 2010: 54). Celebrities must attempt to construct claims consistent with past political statements and performances across fields (Ribke, 2015), but are *also* evaluated based on consistency with formal political norms.

5.7.3 The Limited Political Value of Celebrity Capital

These findings demonstrate a perception of celebrity as unserious, compounded by how Labour's 'bunch of comedians' accumulated their capital in the field of entertainment (Turner and Holehouse, 2015). Celebrity capital is seen as a resource that generally lacks political value, but *can* be incredibly valuable if the celebrity is accepted as speaking for others. In this context the celebrity's intervention is seen as a source of potential political benefits in two key ways. The support of a 'popular' celebrity able to attract attention is

seen to possess strategic benefits for politicians. Pease and Brewer (2008) demonstrated these *perceived* benefits can have *practical* implications; where an endorsement is seen to increase a party or candidate's chances of success, individuals feel they are a more viable choice at the ballot box. In Russell Brand's case we saw perceptions that celebrity capital could have broader democratic benefits, not simply helping politicians to 'reach' voters but providing alternative means of 'connecting' citizens with campaigns.

In practice the cases presented here show little evidence of political benefits, either for the celebrities unable to obtain political capital or for the politicians and citizens their endorsements sought to connect. Responses were more likely to perceive celebrities as having a positive impact on Labour's campaign than a negative one in three of the four cases. Otherwise responses to endorsements on Twitter were more likely to report feeling more negatively both about the celebrity *and* Labour in almost all cases, while only Coogan's endorsement received a higher proportion of positive responses than negative. Coogan's intervention points to the one political benefit I find resulting from celebrity claims in this chapter: a sense of enthusiasm among existing activists when 'popular' celebrities are revealed to support their 'team'. While 'popularity' also underpins evaluations of whether an endorsement is politically valuable, sustaining claims to represent citizens in proximity to politicians presents great challenges to those seeking acceptance as politically credible.

5.8 Conclusion

The celebrities studied here received different levels of interest as they intervened in an election campaign, and were also evaluated on different terms. I argue that these conclusions are interconnected. For a celebrity endorsement to be seen as politically valuable the celebrity must demonstrate ability to 'reach' citizens by attracting media attention, and preferably also a high volume of views and followers online. Celebrity endorsements that fail to attract attention will therefore be judged to have failed. The three

endorsements presented here which *did* attract media attention were all subject to ‘reading back’ by journalists, with individual evaluations on Twitter often following political information cycles focused on scandal or debates over strategy. Paradoxically this chapter shows that celebrity endorsements must spark political information cycles – thereby demonstrating an ability to attract attention – for celebrity capital to be exchangeable for political capital.

The celebrity must be seen not only to ‘reach’ a group of citizens for exchange to occur, but to represent their interests. While this case study supports Brubaker’s argument (2011) that individuals often distance themselves from celebrity, the perception a celebrity influences others translates to acceptance the celebrity *speaks for* others. In the context of formal politics the ‘right’ to speak is not just a question of celebrity capital but of personal credibility, with Russell Brand demonstrating how tightly connected these factors are. While class-based judgements over behaviour and background influence the exchangeability of celebrity capital, this *can* be overcome *if* there is a tangible audience on whose behalf the celebrity is accepted to speak. Once this acceptance is no longer accepted, high celebrity capital is no longer a route to political legitimacy.

The process of claim-making and exchange in electoral contexts is also influenced by a celebrity’s consistency. The ‘meanings’ a celebrity brings to their political interventions from the field of entertainment matter (Jackson and Darrow, 2005; McCracken, 1989), but inconsistency with past political statements precipitates greatest contestation (Štechová and Hájek, 2015). I therefore conclude that while celebrity endorsements are commonplace in parliamentary and Presidential elections, there is limited scope for celebrities to exchange celebrity capital for political capital through these interventions.

6. Everyday Feminism: How does Emma Watson Claim to Represent Feminists and why are these Claims Accepted?

You might be thinking who is this Harry Potter girl? And what is she doing up on stage at the UN? It's a good question and trust me, I have been asking myself the same thing. I don't know if I am qualified to be here. All I know is that I care about this problem, and I want to make it better

Emma Watson (UN Women, 2014b)

Her role as Hermione Granger, the universally adored heroine of the Harry Potter series, gives her an automatic in with male and female millennials. This is a rare case where an actor being conflated with their role might be a good thing

Vanity Fair (Robinson, 2014)

In September 2014 Emma Watson delivered a speech to the UN General Assembly to launch UN Women's HeForShe campaign, inviting citizens to 'step forward' and 'speak up' against gender inequality (UN Women, 2014b). This speech attracted attention from news and entertainment media sources internationally and the HeForShe conference was watched over 11 million times (HeForShe, 2015), with Twitter subsequently painting #HeForShe on the wall at its headquarters (Nichols, 2014). While Watson is part of a long history of collaboration between celebrities and the UN (Wheeler, 2013), she has gone beyond this formal political role in her efforts to start conversations about gender inequality. In January 2016 Watson launched Our Shared Shelf (subsequently referred to as OSS), a feminist book group and discussion forum which rapidly became the largest group on Goodreads.¹¹ On reaching 100,000 members within a month Watson (2016e) thanked members for their 'heart warming' contributions, promising she would 'keep going out there and trying to make this the best it can be' on their behalf.

¹¹ Goodreads (2018) is a website which allows members to search its database of books to 'find and share' books. Members can add books to 'shelves' on their profiles, write book reviews, add other members as 'friends', and participate in groups like OSS. As of May 2018 it claims to have 65 million members. The site was bought by Amazon in 2013 (Flood, 2013).

Feminism is a key component of Watson's self-presentation across fields. With a large social media following and continued success in the field of entertainment, her media resources support claims to represent citizens. Watson's image is so intertwined with the studious and steadfast Hermione Granger – her character in the eight *Harry Potter* films (2001-2011) that form the second highest grossing franchise of all time (Forbes, 2017) – that Bell describes an 'intrinsically feminist' 'Hermione/Emma hybrid' (2010: 10). OSS may encourage engagement with feminist politics from those seeking parasocial or perhaps direct interaction with Watson (Giles, 2002), a celebrity Mendick et al. (2015: 2) found British teenagers had 'grown up' and felt an 'intimacy' with. In a context of interplay between feminist activism, popular culture and social media, Watson is well placed to use less formal methods to encourage 'everyday' engagement with political issues (Highfield, 2016). In Chapter 7 I will argue that participating in OSS affords political benefits for members. Here I focus on how Watson encourages members to do so, and constructs claims to represent them.

By Watson's own admission her life has been 'a sheer privilege' (UN Women, 2014b), and she has faced criticism from activists and academics. Rather than her intervention being timely, Alexandra (2017) argues Watson is 'the exact demographic' – 'a young, rich, white, cis-gendered, heterosexual woman' – 'from which millennial feminism so often seeks to distance itself'. Author and Professor Roxane Gay (2014), who would later engage with OSS, expressed concern following Watson's 'unoriginal' HeForShe speech that those engaging with celebrity feminists fail to realise they are 'a gateway to feminism, not the movement itself'. Considering Watson's high celebrity capital, I argue it is worth asking how Watson constructs this gateway and where it can lead. In this chapter I analyse Watson's engagement with OSS across fields and platforms to ask how she makes claims to represent feminists. I then use interviews with OSS

members to ask whether and how Watson motivated their decision to participate, and why she is accepted as a political representative.

I find that Watson makes three different claims to represent OSS, positioning herself both within and above the group. In practice her direct engagement with the group is limited, but is supplemented through her use of social media to ‘perform engagement’ from a distance. Though these claims co-exist in tension in combination they set ‘broad boundaries’, affording her acceptance from members with multiple motivations but a shared suspicion of celebrity. This case continues to demonstrate that celebrity capital is attributed political value where its possessor is seen to have ‘reach’, and accepted to represent others. However while participants distanced themselves from celebrity in general they did *not* from Watson specifically, who was accepted through positive comparison to ‘other celebrities’. The factors informing these comparisons – chiefly Watson’s proximity to (non-partisan) political institutions and consistently ‘appropriate’ self-presentation – demonstrate the resources which provide strongest support for exchanging celebrity capital for political capital.

6.1 Context and Theoretical Expectations

6.1.1 Emma Watson: From ‘Cleverest Witch’ to Celebrity Ambassador¹²

Ribke’s (2015: 174) observation that ‘transitions to politics’ generally occur once ‘careers in the entertainment industries have begun to decline’ does not apply to Watson. Her claims are supported not only by high celebrity capital but a large social media following which, as Chapters 4 and 5 have shown, provides a tangible constituency she may be assumed to speak for. Her Instagram following of 46 million places her account in the

¹² In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, the third book in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series (1999: 346), Hermione is called the ‘cleverest witch of your age’ by teacher Remus Lupin.

top 35 internationally (Socialblade, 2018), while she has 34 million Facebook ‘likes’ and 29 million Twitter followers.¹³

Watson demonstrates her engagement with feminist activism across fields and platforms. She has participated in the celebrity-founded Time’s Up campaign inspired by #MeToo,¹⁴ promoting this on social media while using Hollywood award ceremonies to ‘amplify, amplify, amplify’ feminist activists (The Guardian, 2018). These acts, along with her £1 million founding donation to the Justice and Equality Fund (2018) to fight sexual harassment, associate the UN ambassador with the more ‘everyday’ forms of feminist activism to which social media and popular culture are central (Bates, 2014; Cochrane, 2013; Highfield, 2016). Watson can therefore – to a greater degree than Russell Brand - combine high celebrity capital with micro-celebrity practices, giving followers the *impression* of intimacy and interaction (Marwick, 2015: 333) while performing claims to reach a wide group (Saward, 2010: 148).

Watson’s association with Hollywood film should render her celebrity capital more exchangeable than that accumulated in a ‘low status’ genre such as comedy or reality television (Arthurs and Little, 2016; Wood, 2017). As one of the highest paid female actors of 2017 (Guardian Staff, 2017), Watson’s intervention in the political field did not follow a loss of status in entertainment as Brand’s did (Arthurs and Little, 2016). It is difficult to overstate the success of *Harry Potter*; J.K. Rowling’s books have sold more than 450 million copies worldwide (Statista, 2016), and a large fandom of ‘Potterheads’ continue to demonstrate strong affective attachment to the series (Jenkins, 2012). Watson’s continued association with Hermione Granger is valuable not simply

¹³ Figures correct as of May 2018.

¹⁴ Time’s Up is an anti-harassment campaign founded by 300 women in Hollywood, including Emma Watson. It aims to fight sexual harassment in the entertainment industry but also to support working-class women through a legal defence fund (Buckley, 2018). It was founded in response to #MeToo, a hashtag used since 2006 to share stories of sexual harassment and violence which went viral in 2017 following revelations of routine harassment by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein (Langone, 2018).

because of this popularity, with the character reinforcing the resources which support her representative claims.

The similarities between Granger and Watson, from their love of learning to human (or house elf) rights campaigning, have not gone unnoticed. J.K. Rowling commented Hermione would be ‘extremely proud’ of Watson’s activism (jk_rowling, 2015), while Bell (2010: 10) argues Watson ‘is Hermione Granger in a very real way’. This lends Watson a consistency of self-presentation that could be seen as ‘authentic’ (Marwick, 2013; Thomas, 2014), and continued connection to a ‘large body of work’ which ‘reinforces her brand as the smart, rule following, and purely good character’ (O’Donnell, 2017: 117). Watson may again prove an exception to the trends observed by Ribke (2015: 174), who argued that right wing celebrities more often possess the coherent on/off screen persona that supports successful political interventions. Hermione also reinforces Watson’s middle-class ‘trajectory’ which makes her more likely to share the ‘legitimate manner’ and ‘correct’ language of the political field (Bourdieu, 1984; 1987), facilitating her movement across ‘less porous’ field boundaries (Giles, 2015). I found in Chapters 4 and 5 that celebrity representative claims are ‘read back’ due to ‘inappropriate behaviour’, as celebrities negotiate ‘established conventions’ which privilege ‘seriousness’ (Inthorn and Street, 2011: 482). I build on this previous work on Watson by examining how perceptions of her *as a celebrity* influence acceptance of her *as a political representative*, enabling her to exchange her celebrity capital for political recognition.

As I discussed in section 3.3, Mendick et al. (2018: 156) argue that celebrities are evaluated as ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’ of fame and wealth, with Watson’s ‘middle-class femininity’ key to perceptions of her as typifying the ‘deserving’ celebrity who ‘shuns fame’. While fame is seen as ‘legitimate if it is used to benefit others’ those who ‘want to be famous’ are castigated (Mendick et al., 2018: 147), a classed judgement which O’Donnell (2017) argues also underlies the ‘virgin/whore’ distinction by which feminists

are judged. Both argue that Watson's self-presentation capitalises on these distinctions, with Mendick et al. (2018) arguing that Watson performs an 'ambivalent relationship to fame'. Watson is therefore more likely to be accepted as a 'serious' political representative, with the 'alignment' of Watson and Granger with 'elite education and high achievement' particularly consistent with claims to represent a feminist book group (Mendick et al., 2018: 156). Indeed Watson founded OSS during a 'break from acting' taken to 'further her knowledge of feminism' (Lee, 2016). She also situated the group within a personal journey that began with her appointment as a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador.

6.1.2 From the UN to Your Book Shelf

While UN Women (2014a) note Watson had 'several years' experience promoting campaigns for girls' education, her appointment as Goodwill Ambassador marked her migration into the political field and a reorientation of her image around feminism. She welcomed the opportunity to 'make a real difference' on an issue 'so inextricably linked with who I am', hoping to 'bring more of my individual knowledge, experience and awareness to this role' as she learned more (BBC Newsbeat, 2014). UN Under-Secretary-General Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka hoped Watson would enable UN Women's 'messages' to 'reach the hearts and mind of young people globally' (BBC Newsbeat, 2014). She has promoted these messages through HeForShe, a 'solidarity movement' encouraging men and boys in particular to make a 'HeForShe commitment' to 'take action against gender bias, discrimination and violence' (HeForShe, 2016). Hopes that Watson would afford the campaign 'reach' were validated following her September 2014 speech. HeForShe head Elizabeth Nyamayaro described how interest 'exceeded what we expected' due to Watson's 'authentic voice and passion' (Packham, 2015). Watson's address to the UN General Assembly was delivered in a fittingly professional style, as she acted as a representative for UN Women 'reaching out' to citizens because 'we need

your help' (UN Women, 2014b). Watson shared the formative experiences in her life leading her to 'decide I was a feminist', encouraging others to 'step forward' to join the 'uniting movement' of HeForShe. Watson acknowledged she is 'one of the lucky ones', but addressing the anticipated question of what 'this Harry Potter girl...is doing speaking at the UN' she described a 'responsibility to say something' having been 'given the chance'.

Watson has continued to demonstrate her commitment, with Nyamayaro crediting her 'full-time' 'dedication' as 'more than a celebrity face' (Meltzer, 2016). In January 2015 she made a further speech to launch HeForShe's initiative 'IMPACT 10x10x10' at the World Economic Forum. In response to 'feedback' that people were unsure how to participate – 'men say they've signed the petition, what now?' – Watson told citizens 'the "what now" is down to you' (HeForShe, 2015). As I will discuss in Chapter 7 IMPACT 10x10x10 focuses on organisational-level change, while HeForShe more broadly provides no dedicated platform for those who take 'commitments' to communicate or collaborate. By framing OSS as a 'next step' from her UN role (Our Shared Shelf, 2016), Watson affords those who have followed her 'journey' additional opportunities to engage.

In contextualising OSS in her UN role Watson also emphasised her experience, telling potential members she wanted to 'share what I've been learning' from the reading she had been doing as a result (Our Shared Shelf, 2016). While a focus on education is consistent with Watson's image, it is more challenging to reconcile her high celebrity capital with this more 'everyday' political context. OSS is not the only Goodreads group associated with a celebrity; an official group for Oprah's Book Club has over 30,000 members while OSS approaches 220,000 as of April 2018. However this is not comparable as there is no suggestion she engages with the Goodreads group.¹⁵ The use of

¹⁵ Goodreads is not the 'main' site for Oprah's Book Club, and Winfrey does not have a Goodreads profile. The club initially operated through a slot on Winfrey's TV programme from 1996-2011, and now

a messaging forum as OSS' base and Watson's framing of the group as a discussion 'with and between you all' (Our Shared Shelf, 2016) suggests a level of participation from Watson and a proximity to members at odds with her movie star status (Marshall, 2014). Finding in practice that Watson's direct engagement with the group is limited, I use interviews with members to assess the extent to which engagement is motivated the potential for (parasocial) interaction with her (Giles, 2002).

Watson must not only negotiate her proximity to members, but also from formal politics. By framing OSS within her 'connection' to 'more conventionally legitimate institutional structures', Watson lends a 'sense of authorization' to her representative claims (Saward, 2010: 104). However we have seen that celebrity claims are often based on *distance*, as celebrities use opposition to 'politics' to position themselves among the 'ordinary people' they claim to represent. This raises the question of how Watson foregrounds her institutional connections without being rejected as 'inauthentic' (Saward, 2010: 107). I now set out the methods and questions used to explore how Watson uses these resources to construct representative claims, and what their evaluation can tell us about how celebrity capital is attributed value in the political field.

6.2 Methods and Questions

I used an ethnographic approach to study how Watson engages with OSS, why she is accepted as a representative, and what this means for those who feel that she represents them. I joined the group and began reading the books selected for discussion and occasionally posting messages in March 2016, keeping a document of reflective fieldnotes to ensure research was informed by 'ethnographic practices' (Kozinets, 2015:

runs through Oprah's website (OPRAH.COM, 2017). Winfrey's influence can be seen in increased sales of the books she has selected, with Butler et al. (2005: 23) finding that each of the 48 books she recommended between September 1996 and April 2002 became a best-seller in the US for 'at least a few months'. However the Club has never had a central platform for citizens to discuss books, and though Winfrey has associated herself with Presidential candidates and political movements the Book Club has no overt political aims.

84). While Watson claims at times to be an ‘ordinary member’, studying the group’s celebrity founder required different data and presented different challenges.

6.2.1 Studying Emma Watson

Ethnographic methods allow us to ‘compare what people do with what they say they do’ (Boellstorff et al., 2012: 170), ideal for assessing how Watson claims to represent the group *and* her engagement with OSS in practise. I collected her OSS posts between January 2016 and January 2017 (32) in a Word document and organised these by type (interactions, book announcements, and other announcements), noting the total number of posts on threads started by Watson and summarising these responses. I collected Watson’s interviews with feminist authors on behalf of OSS during this period, and member comments on these. I compiled a separate document of fieldnotes on Watson’s Goodreads profile, but also how she represents OSS through her Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts. Where Watson’s activism attracted attention from news and entertainment sources I collected online news articles through Google Alerts, also collecting magazines (*Elle* and *Vanity Fair*) and newspapers (*The Sun*) when Watson appeared on the front page. I used this data to analyse, through open coding, how Watson describes her role in OSS and how she presents herself and her relationship to other members. For example I tagged references to Watson’s UN role, the use of language positioning her among members, and statements inviting interaction. I will show how Watson uses practices like this, through forum posts but also other media, to perform three types of representative claim.

The posts from OSS members I collected will not be used in the same way as Watson’s, who as a public figure is an exception to the general ‘principle of anonymity’ in online ethnography (Boellstorff et al., 2012). To keep other members anonymous and

ensure informed consent, I do not reproduce members' posts.¹⁶ My analysis of why members engage with OSS and how they evaluate Watson's representative claims therefore required a different approach.

6.2.2 Studying Our Shared Shelf Members

Observations about members' posts form not the basis of analysis, but the basis of the questions I address about OSS members here and in Chapter 7. I read the daily email digest of posts sent by Goodreads, regularly visiting the group to scan threads. I pasted posts I found interesting in a Word document, initially taking a broad approach as 'ethnography is emergent and inductive, we do not always know what to notice' (Kozinets, 2015: 190). I organised these into common themes and continued to collect posts relating to the following: 'praise of and problems with OSS', 'perceptions of the aim of OSS and Watson's role', 'learning and participation', 'Donald Trump', 'HeForShe', 'Emma, HeForShe and/or OSS as positive influence', 'critical discussion of Watson'.

Due to the ethical issues discussed but also because I wanted to explore members' motivations for participating, I did not use these fieldnotes as the basis of analysis but instead to 'frame questions for interviews' (Boellstorff et al., 2012: 93). Acknowledging that I was 'on their territory' (Kozinets, 2015: 150) I sought permission from the group's moderators before posting a recruitment message on the forum. I emphasised my interest in speaking to members regardless of their level of participation, seeking to avoid the 'common issue' of only understanding the motivations and perceptions of the most 'visible' members (Hine, 2000: 24).

The 22 participants recruited include some among the most active members – having posted over a thousand times – and at least four who had never posted. I discuss

¹⁶ OSS is an open forum, accessible without creating a Goodreads account. This means direct quotes from members' posts could be used to locate the original source and poster through search engines (Kozinets, 2015: 141). I discuss this and other ethical considerations further in Appendix C.

the varied scale and methods of engagement among participants in Chapter 7. Table 6.1 below shows the age and location of each participant, 19 of whom identify as female and three as male.

Table 6.1. Age and location of participants

Name	Age	Location (and other nationality or heritage where given)
Alex	19	Austria
Alyssa	33	USA
Amber	25	UK
Anna	32	UK (Polish)
Bianca	44	Spain
Chloe	34	UK
Christopher	53	USA
Clara	28	Germany (French)
Claudia	22	Germany
Hannah	25	Hungary
Isabella	23	USA
Louise	25	Austria
Maria	69	Mexico (USA)
Matthew	53	UK
Michelle	27	USA
Olivia	30s	UK
Paul	43	USA
Rosa	41	Italy
Sophia	28	USA (Latina)
Stephanie	60+	UK
Tricia	43	Canada
Yasmin	20	UK (British Nigerian)

Note: All names are pseudonyms.

Participants were sent nine questions and told they could respond however they chose. Participants responded in writing through email or Goodreads private messages, except one who participated in a Skype phone interview. Three participants engaged in further discussion in writing or on Skype. Information on the date and format of each interview is given in Appendix C. The questions most relevant to this chapter are shown below (with all questions presented in section 7.2):

1. Why did you want to join Our Shared Shelf?
2. Were you already following Emma Watson's feminist activism before (through HeForShe and/or through her social media)?

3. If so, what was it about Emma Watson and/or her activism that made you want to get involved?

4. What do you do on OSS, and what do you most enjoy about being part of it?

Using questionnaires rather than face-to-face interviews means responses may be narrower, as you cannot establish the same rapport or prompt participants to expand on responses (Hine, 2015). However I felt this approach would give participants time to reflect (some described writing their answers over several days) and provide ‘rich’ and ‘open’ responses (McCoyd and Kerson, 2006), also broadening the range of participants by using a ‘comfortable and convenient’ space for members to talk (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Hine, 2015). Participants signed online consent forms giving permission to use their responses,¹⁷ and I compensated each with a voucher or charitable donation.

I organised responses into individual documents ‘by question’ and ‘by person’, analysing them manually on paper through open coding. I first noted recurring themes such as representation or community, then went through responses again using these as codes. Along with fieldnotes, this inductive analysis informed the specific questions I chose to address (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The questions discussed in this chapter can be seen below, with the codes used to answer each question shown in results tables.

Do members participate in OSS because of Emma Watson?

- Were participants already following Watson’s feminist activism before joining OSS?
- What prompted participants to join OSS?
- What motivated participants to join OSS?

¹⁷ A copy of this consent form, as well as the full questionnaire sent to participants and the recruitment message posted on the Goodreads forum, can be seen in Appendix C.

(Why) is Emma Watson accepted as a representative for feminists?

Before assessing why Watson is accepted as a representative, I first demonstrate how Watson constructs three types of claim to represent OSS members.

6.3 How does Watson Make Claims to Represent Our Shared Shelf?

As part of my work with UN Women, I have started reading as many books and essays about equality as I can get my hands on. There is so much amazing stuff out there! Funny, inspiring, sad, thought-provoking, empowering! I've been discovering so much that, at times, I've felt like my head was about to explode... I decided to start a Feminist book club, as I want to share what I'm learning and hear your thoughts too.

Emma Watson (Our Shared Shelf, 2016)

In the group description quoted above Watson outlines her initial aims for OSS and its members, presenting her own role as mixing leadership and membership. Watson told readers she would 'post some questions/quotes to get things started' and invite 'prominent voices' to 'join the conversation', this conversation presented as 'open discussion *with and between you all*' (Our Shared Shelf, 2016). In practice Watson's visible engagement on the forum during the period of analysis was limited; she did not interact with other members, and her self-presentation was guarded and professional.

To only consider Watson's posts on OSS however would be to underestimate the work she undertakes in the group's name. I argue Watson's resources enable her to perform three representative claims, which I discuss in turn. These co-exist in tension, as Watson positions herself both above the group as 'connected representative' and within it as 'ordinary member'. Watson also uses a range of practices within but largely *outside* OSS to perform a third claim to be an 'authentic ambassador'. In combination Watson uses these claims to manage her proximity both to formal politics and members, creating 'broad' boundaries I argue are key to her acceptance.

6.3.1 Claim One: Watson as 'Connected Representative'

If this book club can be that, a link between people, then I've done a good thing
and I'm very proud

Emma Watson (2016e)

Watson situated her 'decision to start a feminist book club' within her 'work with UN Women' (Our Shared Shelf, 2016), positioning herself above members as 'connected representative'. Watson's 'connection' here is not only to political elites and 'legitimate institutional structures' (Saward, 2010: 104), but to the 'prominent voices' she invited to 'join the conversation' (Our Shared Shelf, 2016). Acting as a broker, Watson (2016e) uses her celebrity capital to 'link' members with each other but also her social capital to connect members with her elite networks (Bourdieu, 1987). In using her UN position and the opportunities for 'learning' this affords, Watson foregrounds her 'expertise and special credentials' (Saward, 2010: 98). This is a stark contrast with Chapter 5, where celebrities constructed distance from 'politics' as they endorsed a party of government.

Watson places her UN role on equal footing with her acting career, describing herself as 'Actor & UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador' across social media. She positions herself above members on the basis of connections and qualifications, emphasising a responsibility to members to make OSS 'the best it can be' (Watson, 2016e). This is consistent with the emphasis of OSS on learning I discuss in Chapter 7, but also with Watson's personal trajectory as the Ivy League graduate who studied English Literature as a 'rebellion against fame' following her years playing a straight-A student (Sieczkowski, 2013).

By selecting and introducing books Watson acts as a facilitator, encouraging members to link these to current political debates but rarely sharing her own views. Introducing *The Handmaid's Tale* Watson (2017b) noted that Atwood's book had become a 'tag' to describe 'policies aimed at controlling women', encouraging members to think

‘beyond the tag’ and ‘share our thoughts about how we think its dystopian vision relates to the world of 2017’. In keeping with Watson’s emphasis on institutional connections her self-presentation is guarded and professional. Her Goodreads profile features a black and white headshot and little personal information, her only listed interest being ‘Our Shared Shelf’ and the ‘about me’ section simply linking to the group. Neither this nor the ‘front page’ of OSS reference Watson’s career in the field of entertainment. This cautious self-presentation extends to her engagement with the books and issues discussed, as Watson rarely shares her opinion and does not make use of the affordances of Goodreads allowing users to share ratings or write book reviews.

This indicates the resources Watson uses, and does not use, to support claims. While emphasising proximity to political institutions she distances herself from celebrity, an ‘ambivalence’ toward fame Mendick et al. (2018: 158) argue is ‘central’ to her self-presentation. Watson’s celebrity capital is framed as a resource only to execute her responsibilities, connecting members to each other and other ‘prominent voices’ they can learn from (Our Shared Shelf, 2016). This can be seen in her post to thank members after OSS reached 100,000 members, where Watson subtly shifts her role from prospective participant in discussion ‘with and between you all’ to a broker ‘proud’ to provide a ‘link between people’ (Our Shared Shelf, 2016; Watson, 2016e). Watson promises to ‘keep going out there and trying to make this the best it can be’, fulfilling her responsibility to ‘figure out the next best thing to read’ and ‘harassing whoever I need to harass to get questions answered’. Watson is most visible as ‘connected representative’ when she interviews authors on behalf of OSS, with Watson or a moderator asking members to suggest questions in advance. While the format varies some interviews allow Watson to represent OSS to outside audiences, for example her interview with *Persepolis* author Marjane Satrapi published by *Vogue*. This interview demonstrates a tension in basing celebrity representative claims on formal political resources.

Prior to interviewing Satrapi Watson (2016i) asked members to share questions, promising to ‘ask her as many as I can’. This interview ultimately had a more conversational style however, with Watson (2016j) only putting two member questions to Satrapi. As the two traded personal stories Watson spoke in a less formal style, including the use of swear words. Responses on the forum suggest members appreciated this more personal style, praising the ‘genuine conversation’ and ‘loose’, ‘unedited’ exchange between people with a ‘real connection’. It appears less important that Watson directly represents members’ views to ‘prominent voices’ and broader audiences than that they can gain a ‘backstage’ glimpse of the guarded star (Goffman, 1959). Seward (2010: 107) argues that non-electoral claims are often evaluated through whether someone appears ‘genuine in their convictions’, with Inthorn and Street (2011: 482) finding citizens use ‘clues’ from celebrities’ personal lives to assess genuineness. While Watson’s professional self-presentation is consistent with her use of connections and qualifications as resources, there is therefore potential for tension with members’ desires for a more ‘authentic’ self-presentation.

This tension between respectability and relatability is further complicated by negative media coverage when Watson acts incongruently with her established image. Watson’s discussion of a website about female sexual pleasure was cut from an interview with Gloria Steinem by the production company which filmed it for OSS. This did not go unnoticed as this part of the interview attracted attention from online news and entertainment sources. The *Daily Star* for example played on perceived transgression by deeming ‘Hermione’ to be ‘all grown up now’ (Davis, 2016). While Watson may therefore benefit from association with ‘the virginal Hermione Granger’ as O’Donnell (2017: 112) argues, this also narrows the claims she can construct without contestation.

While I find that Watson is often able to use media attention to her advantage, her work in the field of entertainment sometimes sparks political information cycles beyond

her control. After an image from a *Vanity Fair* photoshoot to promote *Beauty and The Beast* was featured on page three of *The Sun* because her breasts were partly uncovered,¹⁸ Watson was accused of hypocrisy for advocating feminism but posing partly clothed (Boult, 2017). While this demonstrates the centrality of ‘respectable femininity’ to Watson’s image (Mendick et al., 2018: 158), her response highlighted constraints to her claims to represent feminists. In a further promotional interview Watson responded ‘feminism is about giving women choice, feminism is not a stick with which to beat other women...I don’t really know what my tits have got to do with it’ (Rodulfo, 2017). Rather than allowing Watson to reclaim the political information cycle, media attention shifted to tweets and comments on Instagram accusing her of hypocrisy over comments made in 2014 that she felt ‘conflicted’ about how feminist pop star Beyoncé presented herself (Truong, 2017). While Watson intervened again by tweeting the full text of this interview to provide context (Rodulfo, 2017), using ‘expertise’ as a resource to support claims renders the maker vulnerable to ‘reading back’ when perceived to fall short. While Watson’s association with respectability, higher education and ‘middleclassness’ supports claims to be ‘connected’ to political elites (Bourdieu, 1987; Mendick et al., 2018; Saward, 2010), it complicates claims to understand the interests of OSS members and feminists more broadly.

Watson negotiates these difficulties by noting the responsibility she feels to ‘figure out the next best thing to read’ for a group which has become ‘much more international than I expected – and much bigger’ (Watson, 2016e; 2016g). Introducing Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* following some criticism of her previous choice, Watson (2016g) told members: ‘I’ve been searching high and low for our next book...I’m having to find books that are accessible, cover multiple perspectives and languages, that are

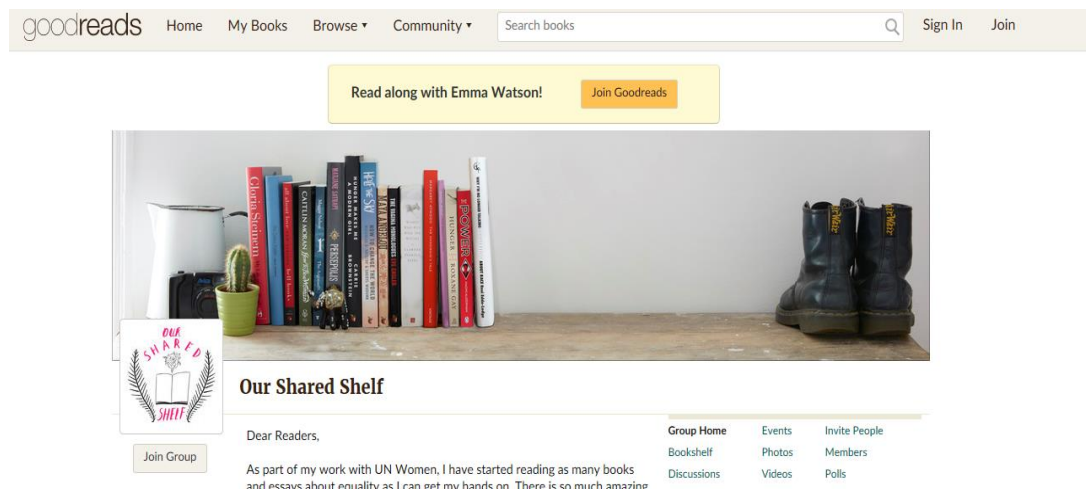
¹⁸ Until January 2015 Page 3 of *The Sun* showed images of ‘topless’ models. This feature was the target of feminist campaign ‘No More Page Three’ (Sexist News, 2016)

unique’. While Watson presents these responsibilities as part of her ‘connected representative’ claim, she also downplays them through claims to be an ‘ordinary member’. I now discuss how Watson uses language to position herself among rather than above members to make this claim, which is ultimately at odds with her participation in practice.

6.3.2 Claim Two: Watson as ‘Ordinary Member’

Building on her hope OSS would ‘grow’ into ‘open discussion *with* and between you all’ (Our Shared Shelf, 2016), Watson continued to use language positioning her among members. Announcing the next book would be *The Vagina Monologues* Watson (2016k) told members: ‘I’m so interested to see which monologues *we* all like best, and which ones still shock *us*’. While sourcing questions for Gloria Steinem Watson (2016c) expressed hope ‘*we* could put *our* heads together and come up with the best possible questions *as a group*’. Watson’s (2016b) first book announcement post struck a conversational tone, asking ‘Who has their copy?’ and telling members she was ‘reading it with a pen in hand so I can do some underlining and margin writing. Time to make a cup of peppermint tea!..Got to get reading!’ Watson (2016d) continued to give the impression she was ‘learning and reading with’ members through phrases such as ‘I’m excited to read this book with you’ (Watson, 2016g), and ‘I’m excited to hear what you think’ (Watson, 2016h). The potential for shared experience and even direct interaction with Watson to motivate members was not lost on Goodreads. If you visit OSS without being logged in, as Figure 6.1 below shows, you are presented with a banner inviting you to ‘read along with Emma Watson’ by joining.

Figure 6.1. Our Shared Shelf homepage on the Goodreads website



Watson constructs a set of interests and aims among OSS members, making a ‘mirroring claim’ to be on a shared journey to learn about feminism (Saward, 2010: 100). While this makes Watson’s ‘ordinary member’ claims similar to those discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 there is a key difference: Watson does not distance herself from ‘politics’ nor use populist rhetoric to position herself among her constituency. By emphasising shared experiences and motivations for engagement Watson positions herself as a ‘fellow learner’ rather than ‘teacher’, affording her opportunities to ‘perform learning’.

Watson’s uncharacteristically long and personal post to announce OSS would read Reni Eddo-Lodge’s *Why I Am No Longer Talking To White People About Race*, and the media attention this attracted, shows how Watson can benefit from her ‘ordinary member’ claim. Watson (2017a) used this to address contestation that she is a ‘white feminist’,¹⁹ presenting this as a learning opportunity while acknowledging ‘there is so much more for me to learn’. She reframed her ‘UN speech’ from being her source of expertise to being

¹⁹ ‘White feminism’ is a critical term used to describe feminism that focuses on women who do not experience forms of oppression based (for example) on race, sexuality or class. Watson has been accused of being a white feminist since her first HeForShe speech (McCarthy, 2014), and criticised for previously responding to this accusation by simply stating that her ‘bosses’ at the UN were ‘two black women’ (Kelly, 2018).

merely the beginning of a ‘journey’ of ‘interrogation of self’. Watson discussed developing beyond her original message that ‘being a feminist is simple’ and learning to ask the right questions about her privilege. Watson (2017a) related this ‘journey’ to the each member’s ‘own journey’, telling them she was ‘looking forward to discussing’ the book ‘in more detail with you soon’. This reached a broader audience through attention from news and entertainment media, praising her ‘acknowledgement’ of white privilege and her ‘lesson in self-awareness and intersectionality’ (Animashaun, 2018; Bradley, 2018; Canty, 2018; Kelly, 2018; Muller, 2018; Okolosie, 2018). While Watson benefits from being judged as ‘ordinary member’ in this context, her claims based on possessing and downplaying capital are difficult to reconcile.

Though Watson has expressed pride in ‘seeing’ discussion flourish, her own implied role as an active participant is not one she has attempted to fulfil. In practice Watson’s direct engagement with the group is limited, and interaction with members almost non-existent. Between January 2016 and April 2017 Watson published 34 posts; of these 24 were announcements, 12 announcing the next book. Of the eight posts categorised as ‘interactions’ seven were posted in the group’s first two weeks. Watson’s (2016a) first ever post reassured a member who asked where she was that ‘I’m here! I am having the best time reading these discussion boards!’ This use of replies to make her presence visible and participate as ‘ordinary member’ did not last. While Watson often poses questions in her book announcement posts she made only one significant effort to ‘get things started’ with discussion (Our Shared Shelf, 2016). Starting a thread to discuss Alice Walker’s *The Colour Purple* Watson (2016f) shared her enjoyment (‘I read it in two sittings’) and gave recommendations for further reading, some passed on by Walker herself in a personal phone call. Where Watson played a more *active* role, therefore, her position in relation to other members remains far from *ordinary*.

It is not simply that Watson does not *behave* like an ordinary member but that she is not *treated* as one, either within the group by members or outside of it as she attracts media attention. The only time Watson updated her ‘reading progress’ on Goodreads the automated ‘status update’ this produces received 81 comments, with members telling Watson about their progress, commenting on how quickly she was reading, and asking her for her opinion of the book. Watson’s threads to announce OSS books have received between 126 and 1,241 responses, with posts often phrased as replies that address and thank Watson directly. This suggests an appetite for interaction among some members that could lead to disappointment with Watson’s limited participation. While I cannot make assessments about members who have stopped engaging, on infrequent occasions when a member *has* questioned Watson’s involvement others have responded that if Watson were active in discussions *she* would become the focus of the group rather than feminism. Though Watson’s celebrity capital is therefore irreconcilable with claims to be an ‘ordinary member’ there is a suggestion, one I will argue is supported by interviews, that this is not how members relate to her as a representative.

While Watson does not interact with members she uses language which encourages parasocial interaction, ‘directly performing connectedness’ when she presents herself as ‘reading along with’ members or claims she is ‘seeing’ their contributions (Hills, 2015: 474). Watson’s encouragement of parasocial interaction, like her claims to represent OSS, is not confined to the forum itself. I now discuss how Watson uses her resources and media platforms to perform a third, more nuanced claim to represent OSS as ‘authentic ambassador’. While this does not supplant the claims I have discussed it enables Watson to reconcile some of the tensions within and between them.

6.3.3 Claim Three: Watson as ‘Authentic Ambassador’

In Watson’s first claim connections, capital and credentials position her above OSS. Her second positions her among members, constructing shared interests to claim shared

experience. However Watson also uses ‘performances of engagement’ through other platforms (primarily but not exclusively social media) to support a more complex claim to be ‘authentic ambassador’. I use the term ‘ambassador’ as this positions her both within *and* above the group. While sightings of Watson on Goodreads are rare, she retains connection by speaking and acting in the interests of OSS across the fields of entertainment and politics. Her social media and celebrity capital act as resources to represent the group to wider audiences. While ‘ambassador’ may suggest a formal relationship, here Watson’s less formal modes of self-presentation support a claim to ‘authentic’ interest in feminism.

Watson’s presentation as not simply an ‘ambassador’ but an ‘authentic’ one is based on a ‘mirroring claim’ (Saward, 2010: 100), but one which is more distant from constituents in two key ways. It is not a claim to be an ‘ordinary member’, nor to share a rigid set of political priorities with them, but to be ‘friend’ who broadly shares members’ feminist values. Secondly Watson uses routine social media practices and demonstrations of commitment to the cause across fields to ‘perform engagement’ from a distance. By presenting herself as ‘authentic ambassador’, I argue Watson is able to manage her distance both from formal politics and from members in a way which sets ‘broad boundaries’ to her representative claims.

Just as members’ engagement with OSS is not limited to Goodreads, as I discuss in Chapter 7, Watson is more visible as the group’s representative *outside* of its base. She uses Instagram to share selfies with the books selected, promoting the group to her 45 million followers and often tagging the OSS Instagram account, broadening her invitation to ‘let me know what you think’ (oursharedshelf, 2017). These performances of engagement provide further opportunities for members to feel they are ‘reading along’ with Watson. Following Watson’s selfie with the first book, asking followers ‘Who has their book?’ (emmawatson, 2016a), members began sharing their own OSS selfies

(‘shelfies’) to demonstrate co-participation. By April 2017 #OurSharedShelf had been used in over 10,500 Instagram posts, including ‘shelfies’, pictures and video clips of Watson, pictures of feminist books, quotes, and posts promoting HeForShe. This suggests Watson’s use of social media to ‘directly perform connectedness’ provides welcome opportunities for parasocial interaction (Hills, 2015: 474). While ‘shelfies’ supplement Watson’s forum posts they are not an alternative platform for personal opinions, as captions are brief and announcement-like. Watson’s additional use of social media to document her UN work and broader activism is a display of going ‘above and beyond’ as OSS’ ambassador. This may demonstrate a commitment to the cause perceived as ‘genuinely close to her heart’ rather than simply ‘part of her job’ (Inthorn and Street, 2011: 482).

When Watson performs engagement she not only represents OSS to millions of followers, but attracts attention from news and entertainment media. In spite of the negative coverage discussed earlier, of all the celebrities studied Watson has been most able to use social media to spark political information cycles on her own terms. In collaboration with Books on The Underground Watson used social media to be seen leaving copies of a Maya Angelou book in London Underground stations, with an Instagram video viewed over 4.2 million times (emmawatson, 2016b). These acts support her claims through the attention they attract, with 64 online news stories published about Watson’s underground adventure in November 2016.²⁰

When Watson did the same on behalf of Books on the Subway, attracting further positive news stories, Donald Trump had just become President-elect of the United States. Having previously shared her excitement that the next President could be a woman (EmmaWatson, 2016), Watson told followers: ‘Today I am going to deliver Maya

²⁰ A list of these sources can be found in Appendix C.

Angelou books to the New York subway. And then I am going to fight even harder for all the things I believe in' (Emma Watson, 2016). Watson's claims to 'mirror' constituents' interests not only differ in not using anti-political rhetoric, but in the confidence with which they are performed. While in claims to be 'connected representative' Watson openly negotiates the challenges of representing OSS, her statement that '*I am going to fight even harder for all the things I believe in*' is indicative of how as 'authentic ambassador' she demonstrates no doubt that she represents followers' interests. This is a clear contrast with Russell Brand's tentative positioning of himself as merely an 'amplifier' of constituents' voices in Chapter 4.

These social media practices also demonstrate the centrality of feminist activism to Watson's self-presentation. Across Watson's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts about HeForShe, OSS, and meeting world leaders sit alongside posts promoting her movies and modelling environmentally friendly fashion. She also used these platforms to document her participation in the Women's March in Washington DC on 21 January 2017 (Emma Watson, 2017). These practices support Watson's 'authentic ambassador' claim by promoting the group's values to much larger audiences, and in combination her ability to rapidly accumulate celebrity capital and large social media following broaden the boundaries of her claims. Her constituency is no longer simply OSS but becomes larger and less tangible, with 'visible, comparable metrics' supporting a broader claim to represent feminists (Marwick, 2015: 343). Watson also sets 'broad boundaries' through limited opinion sharing, rarely sharing her interpretations of OSS books or commenting on formal politics. I argued in Chapter 4 that the 'broadness' of Brand's claims was key to acceptance outside of his core constituency, enabling protestors with polysemic priorities to 'see themselves' as constituents (Saward, 2010: 149). I later argue that the broadness of Watson's claims, along with her management of distance, affords her acceptance beyond those who identify as fans.

Watson's consistent self-presentation extends to her foregrounding of feminism across fields. Her public self-reflection over her 2017 turn as Belle in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* demonstrates celebrity representative claims cross field boundaries. Watson claimed she 'turned down' the role of Cinderella as the character was not a 'role model' (Frost, 2017), and contributed to crafting a backstory for Belle emphasising her 'empowering defiance' (Furness, 2017). When her claims that Belle is a feminist role model were contested, Watson told *Entertainment Weekly* (2017) she had shared these concerns and addressed them by 'doing some reading'. Watson even took Gloria Steinem to the film's first screening 'for approval', with Steinem concluding 'It was fascinating that her activism could be so well mirrored by the film' (MacKelden, 2017). Watson's 'authentic ambassador' claim is *not* therefore performed by constructing 'independence' from formal political structures, which Saward (2010) argues is how non-electoral representative claims are assessed for authenticity. Instead it is Watson's integration of activism into her career across fields, and use of multiple platforms to demonstrate this, which present 'genuine commitment' (Inthorn and Street, 2011). This is a consistency 'across all aspects of your life and communications' which Marwick (2013: 240) argues is key to perceived authenticity.

In this analysis of how Watson makes claims to represent OSS, I argue she positions herself in relation to members in three ways. As 'connected representative' Watson foregrounds connections and expertise, while as 'ordinary member' she downplays her responsibilities to position herself as a fellow learner. Finally she manages proximity both to formal politics and members by acting as an 'authentic ambassador' for broadly shared values across fields. While these claims co-exist in tension, Watson's ability to perform them simultaneously demonstrates the volume and variety of her resources. Her high celebrity capital is evident as she represents the group to broader audiences and 'prominent voices', yet this 'connection' to cultural and political elites combined with her

personal trajectory supports a professional self-presentation that distances her from celebrity.

With the exchangeability of Watson's celebrity capital dependent on acceptance of her claims, I now turn to interviews with OSS members. I argue that this combination of claims affords *broad* acceptance, beyond the minority of participants who see themselves as fans. I again find that celebrity capital is perceived merely a means to an end, with Watson's valuable for enabling her to create and 'give voice' to OSS. What distinguishes Watson from other cases is that her celebrity capital is more exchangeable for political capital, and not simply because she possesses more of it. By examining how OSS members evaluate Watson's claims, we see that her institutional connections and class-based resources afford her easier movement between the fields of entertainment and politics.

6.4 How is Watson Evaluated by Our Shared Shelf Members?

Watson (2016e) expressed amazement at the interest shown in OSS, telling members it was 'so much more than I have allowed myself to imagine'. While this may seem unsurprising, we should not assume all members were motivated to join by Watson. I find members from undying fan to uninterested reader, but what unites these is a distancing from celebrity in general but *not* Watson specifically. Before discussing why members accept Watson as a representative, I first consider her role in prompting and motivating members to join.

6.4.1 To What Extent is Members' Engagement Motivated by Watson?

Almost all participants were aware of Watson's activism prior to joining. Table 6.2 below shows 14 of 22 participants were 'actively' following Watson, following her on social media or expressing interest in HeForShe, with a further seven aware of her political interventions.

Table 6.2. Were participants previously following Watson’s activism?

Were participants following Emma Watson’s feminist activism before joining OSS?	Number of participants
Yes – actively	14
Yes – aware	7
No	1

Watson’s social media is a valuable resource both due to her large followings, and for attracting attention from news and entertainment media around the world. Table 6.3 below shows eight participants were prompted to join by Watson’s social media while a further five cited seeing an article about the group online. The media attention afforded to OSS may help the group to reach demographics less likely to be among Watson’s social media followers. Although Stephanie (question 2) joined after seeing a BBC article on Facebook, she told me she is ‘not strong on social media so a lot of what happens there passes me by’. While many described prior interest in Watson’s activism, her ability to attract media attention also helps to explain interest in OSS beyond those who identify as fans.

Table 6.3. What prompted participants to join Our Shared Shelf?

What prompted participants to join OSS?	Number of participants
Watson’s social media posts	8
Interest in/engagement with HeForShe	5
Online news article about OSS and Watson	5
Election of Donald Trump	3
Books on the Underground/Subway	2
Goodreads	2

Matthew, a Watson fan, was one of five participants to connect HeForShe with his decision to join OSS. This suggests Watson benefitted from an established association with feminist activism, lending her claims ‘authorization’ (Saward, 2010: 104). However members who ‘see themselves’ in her constituency benefit from Watson going beyond this formal role (Saward, 2010: 149). For Matthew (further questions) joining OSS

appeared a natural ‘next step’ following his HeForShe commitment, as he ‘needed a platform’ to ‘discuss’ his ‘new found worldview’. In Chapter 7 I will argue that OSS provides additional opportunities for citizen engagement and participation not afforded by her more formal political work alone.

Watson’s visible opposition to Trump, a rare direct comment on formal politics, connected her with three participants who joined in the aftermath of his election. Isabella (question 1) had heard about OSS through Watson’s Instagram, but ‘never looked too far into it until that day when I decided I needed to be part of an inclusive community of women’. Similarly Michelle (email correspondence) joined ‘to connect with open-minded, tolerant individuals’ having found the election ‘very rough’. That members were prompted to join in a variety of ways suggests Watson’s broad representative claims attract members who hold multiple motivations for engaging.

Table 6.4. below shows the motivations mentioned by members. I focus here on those who discussed Watson directly or indirectly, exploring the other factors motivating engagement in Chapter 7. These findings suggest Watson played a greater role in making participants aware of the group than in motivating their participation.

Table 6.4. What motivated participants to join Our Shared Shelf?

Motivation for joining	Number of participants
Love of reading	12
Looking for community	11
Wanting to learn	11
Emma Watson	8
Identification with feminism	8
Looking for discussion	5
Wanting to take action	4
Experience of discrimination	4
Looking to teach others	2

Eight of 22 participants described Watson’s involvement as a motivating factor. For the most ardent fans who expressed overt acceptance of Watson’s claims,

participation was inevitable: 'I knew I had to join. I mean, if the queen of Watsonnation is calling on her citizens, I have to obey' (Alex, question 1). As I discuss in Chapter 7 for some fans Watson has provided a pathway into feminism, with Anna (question 3) describing her HeForShe speech as a 'turning point'. The support Watson's history in the field of entertainment lends her acceptance in the political field is clear, with seven participants mentioning Harry Potter. Yasmin (question 3) described herself as a 'huge fan' who has 'followed the stars through their journeys'. While desire for parasocial interaction with Watson inspires some to follow her political 'journey', Watson's distance from members is also key to facilitating acceptance.

Participants did not demand more direct engagement with OSS from Watson in, some expressing appreciation of her 'hands off' role. For fans seeking direct interaction OSS is not seen as the appropriate place for this. Alex (further questions) told me she has sent Watson multiple letters but is 'comfortable' with her role in OSS, 'posting about the new book and that was more or less it', and outside of it where she doesn't say 'every other day on Twitter what she's doing'. By rarely sharing opinions and never intervening in discussions Watson avoids being seen as speaking *over* rather than *for* members, behaving like "I'm the big queen and I'm going to rule over every one of you!" (Alex, further questions). This 'comfortable distance' is key to Watson's broad acceptance. Rosa (question 3) agreed OSS is not the place for Watson's opinions, telling me 'I like the way she propose books and thoughts of others, not presenting them as her own philosophy'. Distance does not however prevent parasocial interaction. Isabella (question 4) described how she likes 'seeing the conversations on the message boards and knowing that other women (including Emma!) have now gained something together from this special book'. By making multiple claims Watson balances proximity and distance, and is accepted by members with differing desires for interaction.

This case provides further evidence that celebrity capital is perceived to have little political value, and is attributed value through what a claim-maker can ‘do’ with it. Louise (question 2) told me she was not motivated by ‘Emma’s celebrity status’, but appreciates how Watson ‘succeeded in gathering a huge crowd of people and got them talking about feminism’. What separates Watson from other celebrities is that acceptance of her representative claims is based on much more than her ‘reach’.

6.4.2 (Why) Do Members Accept Watson as a Representative?

The scale of Watson’s celebrity capital is however a necessary element of its exchangeability. The nine participants who described her as admirable or inspirational often based these judgements on her use of fame to represent feminists (see Table 6.5 below). Watson’s claims are accepted because she can ‘get more audience’, bringing ‘a huge (and certainly diverse) crowd of people’ together while ‘making gender equality issues more accessible for the “every day” person’ (Rosa, question 2; Louise, question 2; Chloe, question 3). Watson is admired for giving ‘voice to a lot of women that haven’t that choice’, using this ‘voice for something positive in the world’ (Bianca, email correspondence; Maria, question 2). I find almost no ‘reading back’ of Watson’s claims, with most participants describing tacit acceptance and some overt acceptance. It may seem unsurprising that those who have joined Watson’s feminist book group accept her representative claims. I argue however that while members do not relate to Watson in three distinct ways to match her types of claim, her ability to perform these simultaneously is key to affording her broad acceptance. While this includes comfortable acceptance beyond those who are Watson fans, before setting out the factors that facilitate this I first discuss how for fans in particular there are political benefits to feeling represented by someone with Watson’s high celebrity capital.

While Watson is valued for representing feminists to large audiences her claims are of personal importance to those who relate to her. Anna - who told me she had been

bullied for not conforming to gender norms - described being ‘very move when Emma tell her story’ because ‘I can truly tell that her story is close to my life’ (question 9). Watson’s claims are of particular importance to those who do not feel represented elsewhere, with Alex who feels her community is ‘simply not there’ describing how she ‘grasps at straws’ to find people who represent her because she ‘can’t really identify with politicians’ (question 3; further questions). In this context Alex’s excitement at seeing her perspective expressed in Watson’s HeForShe speech is understandable (‘I was sitting there like “Emma you can’t be serious! This is so cool!”’). This need for representation forms part of Alex’s engagement with OSS (question 4): ‘I also love to wait for the announcement of the new book...because, you never know, she might select a book about me and my people’. Hannah (question 3) described how knowing she was ‘not the only one who thinks things should change’ inspired her ‘not to accept this situation’. It is therefore not only those most invested in Watson who benefit from seeing her express their concerns.

While I discuss the political benefits of engaging with OSS in Chapter 7, there are broader benefits to feeling your political views or personal experiences are represented by someone with Watson’s ‘reach’. I therefore argue that celebrities not only *could* represent the political views of others (Street, 2004), but that this *does* happen and can be politically valuable for those who recognise themselves as *being represented*. Acceptance of Watson however is based on more than the ‘reach’ afforded by her high celebrity capital, as I now discuss.

Table 6.5. Perceptions of Watson as a representative

Watson is perceived as	Number of participants
Admirable/inspirational	9
Serious (due to institutional links)	6
Serious (in comparison with other celebrities)	6
Relatable	6

Authentic ('genuine', or doing things 'for the right reasons')	4
Committed to the cause	4
Trustworthy	3
Knowledgeable	3
A role model for young women	2

Perceptions of Watson as admirable or inspiring were often connected to her UN role. Claudia for example told me (question 3), 'I admire her work for UN Women very much and in my opinion it's definitely something worth supporting'. Table 6.5 above shows six participants noted Watson's institutional connections, accepting her as a 'serious' political actor due to the 'connection' to 'more conventionally legitimate institutional structures' she foregrounds in her 'connected representative' claim (Saward, 2010: 104). Watson is seen as putting 'her fame to good use' (womensmarchlondon, 2016), conducting herself and her political work the 'right way'. Tricia told me she is 'not interested in ping pong twitter insults or threats' and sees Watson as trying to 'rise above' by 'taking the high road and going through formal channels as much as possible – i.e. the UN' (question 3). Watson's 'connection' allows those who perceive celebrity influence in politics to be negative, and the 'others' who are influenced to be 'gullible' (Brubaker, 2011; Loader et al., 2015), to accept Watson as an exception.

Watson's 'connection' also gives the impression she, compared to other celebrities, is in a stronger position to affect political change due to her 'networks' and 'alliances' (Saward, 2010: 105). Watson was praised as an 'amazing force in the world' and 'force for good' (Isabella, question 2; Olivia, question 2), while for Alex her ability to talk 'to Justin Trudeau and to so many people' means it is 'a bit ridiculous to question her' (further questions). Alex, who told me she could not identify with politicians, described feeling 'really proud' of her former President's support for HeForShe. Watson's UN role enables her to demonstrate connection to international institutions and world leaders, while largely avoiding partisan judgements or making political promises.

Watson therefore benefits from ‘authorization’ without facing the constraints of ‘elective’ representative claims (see section 3.5.1). Unlike Labour’s celebrity endorsers discussed in Chapter 5, she avoids becoming ‘tainted’ through proximity to ‘the politics of “the politicians”’ (Saward, 2010: 107; Tormey, 2015: 7). For Yasmin (question 1), a book club seemed the ideal way to discuss ‘important’ issues without making things ‘horribly political’. By distancing herself from partisan politics and combining her UN position with more ‘everyday’ modes of engagement Watson is seen as serious, but not sanctimonious.

Acceptance of Watson as ‘serious’ through comparisons to ‘other celebrities’ (six participants) is not only based on professional resources or ‘connection’, but also demonstrates the power of her personal resources. Watson’s class background and ‘appropriate’ self-presentation allow her to negotiate ‘stigma around celebrities in politics’ (Brubaker, 2011: 19). Rosa expressed this discomfort when she told me she had initially felt ‘it would be a teen-age behaviour listen to her activism and proposals just because she’s famous’, but changed her mind after ‘reading her posts and listening to her’ (question 2). Alex told me ‘I really love to hate other celebrities’ who would make her think ‘you CAN’T do this! This blew it, I can’t support you’ (further questions), but she feels Watson ‘really represents me better’ even though ‘I don’t agree with her on everything’. While this case further demonstrates that celebrity capital is perceived to be of low political value, participants distanced themselves from celebrity in general but *not* Watson specifically. This is an interesting contrast with Chapter 4, where I found that *Trews* viewers who attended the New Era protest negotiated their support for Russell Brand.

Comparisons to ‘other celebrities’ supported Mendick et al.’s (2018: 239) argument that celebrities are evaluated as ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’. It is Watson’s personal and professional background, and ‘appropriate’ behaviour, which place her on

the ‘right’ side of this divide. Matthew described himself as ‘wary of celebrity’ but says Watson ‘earned his respect’ (question 3), concluding she is ‘as hardworking as she is gifted and earned all she had’ after learning ‘more of her life’ through ‘her media presence’. This suggests citizens use celebrities’ personal lives not only to evaluate ‘genuineness’ (Inthorn and Street, 2011: 482), but their qualification to represent others. For Alyssa Watson’s behaviour rendered her acceptable (question 2), as it was ‘nice to see a young celebrity who’s not getting involved in scandals and drugs...actually doing good productive work in the world’. Claudia agreed that while there are ‘a lot of great women also younger women who stand up’ (question 3), that ‘pop stars who say what they want and dress as they like’ are ‘loud and have a kind of “I don’t give a shit” vibe’. Watson was contrasted positively as someone who ‘seems more down to earth and considerate’, meaning ‘I can identify more with her and would rather have her as a “friend” to guide me’. This also makes Watson, according to Claudia, a role model for ‘fourth wave feminism...especially for our generation who connects so much online’.²¹ Watson’s own use of online tools to attract attention to her activism is also seen as use of celebrity capital for the right reasons.

Chloe (question 3), who admires Watson for not being ‘spoilt’ by fame, sees her activism as a positive by-product of being ‘thrown into the public eye’. This supports Mendick et al.’s (2018: 60) argument that ‘authenticity’ is assessed through class-based judgements over whether fame has ‘changed’ someone, necessitating consistent self-presentation. Watson’s perceived motivations are also contrasted positively, with Chloe praising her use of fame ‘to engage in issues that really matter and do some good in the world – and not just for a PR stunt, as some famous people seem to do’. This distinction

²¹ Whether or not we are seeing a ‘fourth wave’ of feminism is disputed. Cochrane (2013) argues on the basis of interviews with feminist activists that there is a fourth wave, a byproduct of a broader revival of single-issue campaigning in the UK. She associates this fourth wave with technological changes, particularly the use of social media tools in such campaigns, and with intersectionality, the theory that no one form of oppression (such as sexism) can be combatted in isolation from others.

highlights a broader trend. We have seen across cases that for claims to be accepted, the celebrity must be perceived to have ‘reach’. While this makes attracting attention necessary to obtaining political capital, claims are ‘read back’ if the celebrity is perceived to be motivated by self-promotion. I therefore argue there is a ‘paradox of self-promotion’ in how celebrity representative claims are evaluated, and Watson’s resources allow her to negotiate this. Comparisons of Watson to other celebrities demonstrate how class, connection and consistency enable her to use high celebrity capital and social media to promote political causes, while avoiding accusations that she does so to promote herself.

Though Watson benefits from being perceived as ‘serious’, this did not prevent acceptance as ‘relatable’ by six participants. For Anna, Alex and Hannah, this came from relating to the issues and stories Watson discussed in high profile speeches. Alex described ‘feeling she was directly talking to me, as if she wanted to help me and my people’ (question 3), while for Anna Watson’s experiences of being objectified felt ‘close to my life’ (question 3). Watson’s tweets about women’s rights felt to Rosa like a ‘calling to be involved just now, just as I am’ (question 9), while Matthew’s statement that ‘I do like to think we would get on well’ also suggests relatability (question 9). Amber was one of three participants to describe Watson as ‘trustworthy’ (question 3). While Watson’s self-presentation is guarded, her encouragement of parasocial interaction and the rare ‘backstage’ glimpses (Goffman, 1959) she affords followers are sufficient to enable acceptance as ‘authentic ambassador’.

Watson’s performance of multiple claims facilitates her broad acceptance as she is evaluated through the two key ‘modes of reception’ for non-electoral claims: authorization and authenticity (Saward, 2010: 110). While Watson’s ‘authorization’ is based on ‘connection’ to formal political institutions (Saward, 2010: 104), her authenticity is based on perceived motivations rather than ‘independence’. Perceptions of Watson as ‘genuine’ or ‘doing things for the right reasons’, stated by four participants,

are again linked to a distrust of celebrity Watson successfully negotiates. Sophia described Watson as 'genuine' because 'every interview or article written about her she has the same message shine through that makes you trust and believe in her, her passions and her beliefs' (question 3). This supports Marwick (2013) and Thomas' (2014) argument that consistency is key to perceived authenticity, rather than the routine revelation of personal details. Similarly Watson was judged by four participants to appear committed, with Alex inferring this from her decision to take a 'year off' to 'further her knowledge of feminism' (Lee, 2016). Alex concluded 'being a fan of her I know how much she loves acting...this is huge for her' (further questions), supporting Inthorn and Street's (2011: 482) argument that genuineness is assessed through 'clues' from celebrities' personal lives.

Three participants praised Watson as knowledgeable, somebody they could 'learn from' (Olivia, question 1), accepting her claim to be a 'connected representative'. Yasmin admires Watson because she 'always struck me as a very intellectual woman who is strong and a go-getter' (question 3), with a further two participants describing Watson as a role model. While Watson's continued association with Hermione Granger therefore limits her 'acceptable' self-presentation, this coherence across fields and association with a 'positive generic identity' supports her acceptance as a political representative (Ribke, 2015: 174).

While Watson benefits from being perceived as knowledgeable, 'ordinary member' claims which position her as learner rather than teacher may reduce 'reading back' on the basis of wealth and privilege. Indeed it is a notable contrast to the other celebrities studied that Watson's wealth was rarely noted in the media coverage I collected, and was only mentioned by two participants. For Rosa following Trump's election it felt 'inavoidable' to 'do something, no matter how famous or how rich is the person who's talking about it' (question 2). Clara was the only participant to note criticism

of Watson's book selections, but understood Watson's support for a book which had 'really annoyed' her as 'intersectional feminism does not come spontaneously and requires some work' (question 4). For Clara subsequent books selected suggest that 'the criticism has been heard'. Contrasting cases, I argue that Watson is afforded opportunities to 'perform learning' where other celebrities lacking her personal and professional resources face greater challenges in sustaining successful representative claims.

Clara also expressed 'hope' that Watson 'influenced the production' of *Beauty and the Beast* 'to make the story more progressive', as otherwise 'this will go against Watson's work with OSS' (further questions). While presenting a consistent image across fields and platforms is clearly challenging (Turkle, 2011), Watson's ability to do so while claiming to represent constituents from a distance aids her acceptance as OSS' 'authentic ambassador'.

6.5 Conclusion

Watson's case demonstrates that in examining the exchangeability of celebrity capital, scale does matter. Watson's high celebrity capital and large social media following support claims to represent her feminist book group to broader audiences, across the fields of entertainment and politics. Interviews with members show that Watson's ability to attract attention to feminist causes, and the perception she 'gives voice' to others, forms the foundation of her acceptance as a political representative.

Watson acknowledged the difficulty of representing this large and diverse group as she performed claims – based on her connections and credentials – to be its 'connected representative'. She also used language which positioned her among constituents through claims to be an 'ordinary member'. These afford her opportunities to 'perform learning', but are ultimately at odds with her high celebrity capital and limited direct participation in the group. I find however that Watson was able to exchange her celebrity capital for

political capital in this case, without this capital forming a barrier to be negotiated. Watson could therefore use celebrity capital to perform a third claim to be OSS' 'authentic ambassador', using social media to 'perform engagement' with the group from a distance and make broad claims to represent their values.

Comparing case studies, I argue that the interconnection between representative claims and celebrity capital creates a 'paradox of self-promotion'. With the right of a celebrity to possess political capital based on acceptance that they speak for others, particularly if these 'others' are considered unrepresented by political professionals, they must demonstrate an ability to rapidly accumulate celebrity capital. However accumulating celebrity capital can disrupt representative claims, if celebrities are seen to be seeking attention for themselves. I argue that Watson's personal and professional resources enable her to negotiate this successfully, and also explain how she is able to exchange her celebrity capital for political capital with greater ease.

Watson's position as UN Women Goodwill Ambassador 'authorizes' her representative claims (Saward, 2010: 104), affording her acceptance as a 'serious' political actor. By foregrounding this 'connection' while largely avoiding partisan alignment or sharing personal opinions, Watson negotiates her distance from formal politics. This sets broad boundaries to Watson's claims, allowing those with shared values but multiple priorities (as I discuss in Chapter 7) to engage with political issues without feeling 'horribly political' (Yasmin, question 1).

Watson did not of course find herself addressing the UN General Assembly overnight. Her evaluation as a 'serious' political actor, which reconciles her celebrity status with normative perceptions of politics (Inthorn and Street, 2011), is also afforded by class-based resources and consistent self-presentation. Watson's middle-class background and her trajectory of capital accumulation support an image more at ease with

formal political norms (Bourdieu 1984; 1987). While the continued interconnection of this image with Hermione Granger creates tension at times, narrowing the issues she can discuss or ways she can present herself without reports of ‘transgression’, she largely avoids ‘reading back’ on the basis of behaviour and her wealth is rarely mentioned. Her consistent self-presentation across fields and platforms, supported by association with a more ‘prestigious’ position in the field of entertainment (Ribke, 2015), further supports acceptance as her claims are seen as ‘authentic’ (Marwick, 2013; Thomas, 2015). Loader’s et al.’s (2016: 409) finding that young people want politicians to be “‘serious” political actors’ but also ‘one of us’ therefore clearly applies to those who claim representative roles more broadly. Watson’s resources enable her to balance these ‘conflicting requirements’ where other celebrities could not.

This is not to conclude that Watson’s claims are made and evaluated independently of ‘stigma’ surrounding celebrity in politics (Brubaker, 2011). Instead her personal and professional resources mean Watson is accepted as a politically credible exception through positive comparison to ‘other celebrities’. This is not simply due to Watson’s resources but how she uses them to construct representative claims, negotiating distance not just from formal politics but also from OSS members. By performing multiple modes of claim and using social media to ‘perform engagement’ from a distance, Watson sets ‘broad boundaries’ enabling members with varied motivations for engagement and a general discomfort with celebrity to feel comfortable ‘seeing themselves’ in her claims (Saward, 2010: 149).

This case also shows that there are political benefits to recognising one’s interests or experiences as being represented by someone with high celebrity capital. In the following Chapter I assess what other political benefits result from Watson’s claims to represent Our Shared Shelf, and how these benefits are shaped by the aims and affordances of the group itself.

7: Everyday Feminism: What are the Political Benefits of Engagement with Emma Watson's Online Book Group?

I didn't know what to expect when I started this Book Club. To have 100k members in less than a month is amazing and for this I am so grateful but even more amazing is the level at which I see these topics being engaged with and discussed and how generous people are being with their responses and insights into the material. This is what is meaningful to me.

Emma Watson (2016e)

Watson does not propose any solutions in her speech, and while reading feminist books is enlightening for many, it does not equate to action in the real world

O'Donnell (2017: 116)

When Emma Watson started Our Shared Shelf (OSS), a feminist book group and discussion forum hosted on the Goodreads website, she hoped it would 'grow into an open discussion with and between you all' (Our Shared Shelf, 2016). Discussing her aims for the group she emphasised learning, saying she wanted to 'share what I am learning from reading as many books about gender equality as I can get my hands on, and hear your thoughts too'. When the group reached 100,000 members in less than a month Watson (2016e) perceived a burgeoning sense of community, praising the 'amazing' 'level at which I see these topics being engaged with and discussed'.

There is certainly a wealth of material to read and discuss on OSS with a new book selected bimonthly, usually by Watson (2016d) who has expressed a sense of representative responsibility to 'choose works that cover as much ground as possible and are diverse'. These include novels with feminist themes, autobiographies by feminists, and non-fiction books about combatting inequality. The forum provides sections for members to discuss each of these books, but also to start and contribute to discussions on a range of topics related and unrelated to feminism. Having shown in Chapter 6 that Watson is able to exchange celebrity capital for political capital through claims to

represent feminists, here I ask what political benefits result for those who have accepted Watson's invitation to 'join up and participate' in OSS (Our Shared Shelf, 2016).

In this chapter I also expand my analysis of why members participate in OSS, having argued in Chapter 6 that the broad boundaries of Watson's representative claims facilitate comfortable acceptance from members with multiple motivations. I find that members most frequently describe seeking a community of like-minded others, and hoping to learn from these others and the books selected for discussion. This raises the question of whether these motivations are reconcilable, or whether desire for a community of like-minded others precludes political learning. Previous work on message forums suggests the benefits of engagement cannot be assumed, as constructive political discussion flourishes best in contexts where it is not prescribed (Graham et al., 2016b; Wright, 2012). Just as Watson's negotiation of proximity to politics supports her claims, situating OSS within more 'everyday' modes of political engagement affords members comfortable distance from 'the politics of "the politicians"' (Highfield, 2016; Tormey, 2015: 7).

I argue that in founding OSS Watson has provided additional opportunities for political engagement for those who 'see themselves' most clearly in her representative claims: her fans (Saward, 2010: 149). However the political benefits of engagement with the group - most notably opportunities for learning, increased political discussion and more frequent participation - are not confined to OSS' most active members nor the minority who identify strongly as Watson fans.

Throughout this thesis we have seen that the media and technology used shapes how celebrity representative claims are made and evaluated. Here I consider not only how members benefit from their engagement with OSS, but how these benefits are shaped by the group's aims and affordances. I find that the structure of the forum encourages members to trade experiences, helping to reconcile their aims to feel part of a community

of ‘like-minded others’ while also learning from their participation. While social media is a necessary tool for Watson’s performance of claims, her use of a discussion forum for OSS is particularly beneficial for those unable to engage with discussion of feminist issues through social media platforms or other everyday networks.

7.1 Context and Theoretical Expectations

7.1.1 Talking Feminism Online: Situating Our Shared Shelf

Though founding an online book group is a less familiar form of celebrity activism than becoming a UN Goodwill Ambassador, OSS appears however to have more in common with citizens’ ‘everyday’ experience of political issues. Highfield (2016) argues that for many citizens engagement with politics comes ‘tangentially’, as social media, popular culture and issues of personal importance intersect. For Cochrane (2013) the affordances of digital technologies have been key to moving feminist issues into the mainstream, with social media in particular playing a key role in an emerging ‘fourth wave’ of feminism. Recent campaigns have been driven by the ability to share personal experiences online. Laura Bates (2014: 157) describes how the Everyday Sexism project began as a ‘very simple website where women could upload their stories’ but ‘spread like wildfire’ through social media. There are potential benefits to participation, with Bates (2014: 186) arguing this solidarity of shared-experience is meaningful for those who felt ‘guilty or unable to protest’. The opportunities for self-expression afforded by social media are particularly valuable, Mann argues (2014: 294), for black women who have been ‘excluded, silenced, or heavily mediated’. As I noted in Chapter 6 Watson has supported recent movements that demonstrate convergence between feminist activism, social media, and celebrity: #MeToo and Time’s Up. While #MeToo was created by activist Tanara Burke as a way of sharing experiences of sexual harassment, it went viral after American actor Alyssa Milano encouraged others to engage following the revelations of assault by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein (Slawson, 2017). Keller et al.’s (2016) interviews with

women who tweeted #BeenRapedNeverReported shows that such hashtags afford opportunities to share ‘oft-silenced’ stories, producing ‘affective solidarity’.

Engagement with feminist campaigns through social media is not however necessarily easy or without consequence. The continuing failure of the most popular sites to address misogynistic hate speech raises the question of how other platforms could offer complementary (or compensatory) political benefits (Amnesty International, 2018). While Jane demonstrates that online misogyny pre-dates social media (2017: 34), she argues there has been a ‘vast expansion in the number of attackers and targets’ with the ‘design and dominant norms of the contemporary cybersphere’ enabling this. As Shaw puts it (2014: 274), ‘people are jerks not only when they are in anonymous Internet spaces, but also when they are in spaces where they can get away with being jerks’. Feminist activists are frequently targeted with ‘vicious backlash’ online including ‘rape and death threats’ (Cochrane, 2013), leading to broader self-moderation as women seek to ‘avoid similar harassment themselves’ (Jane, 2017: 75).

Previous research suggests online forums such as OSS foster valuable ‘everyday political talk’ (Wright, 2012), but raises questions over whether the group’s explicit political aims could constrict potential benefits. Online ‘third spaces’ - ‘non-political spaces where political talk emerges’ (Wright, 2012) – have been found to foster ‘rational’ political talk whereby citizens connect personal experiences to political problems (Graham, 2010; 2012; Graham et al., 2016a). Graham et al. (2016a: 1373) argue message forums are more conducive to ‘discursive reciprocal exchange’ than social media as threads are easier to follow and have greater longevity, with content analysis of messages finding personal discussions often developed into ‘political actions’. A celebrity-led forum dedicated to feminism would appear an ideal space for citizens to make connections ‘between their everyday lives and the political and social issues of the day’ (Graham et al., 2016a: 1374). However Wright (2012) argues it is the *lack* of focus on

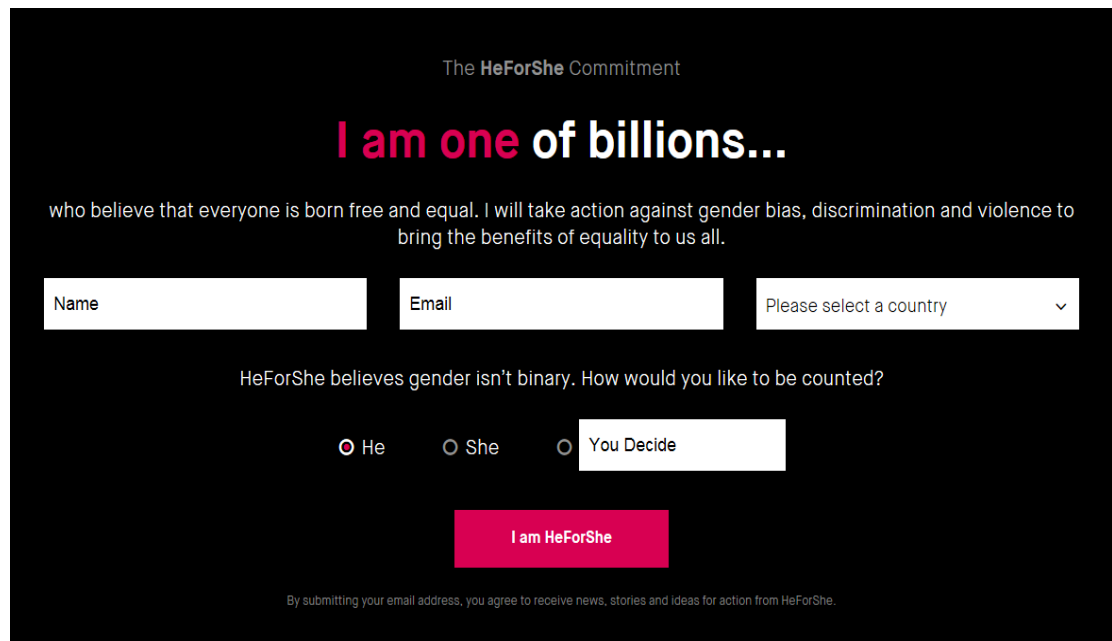
‘politics’ in the aims and structure of ‘third spaces’ that affords political benefits, as discussion is less polarised and more personalised. This raises the question of whether the desire for a community of ‘like-minded others’ among OSS members I interviewed precludes their other motivation to learn. With the nature of political discussions influenced by its structure and culture (Graham et al., 2016a), before asking how OSS members benefit from their engagement with the group I now consider its aims and affordances.

7.1.2 A ‘Next Step’: Affordances of HeForShe and Our Shared Shelf

Watson situated her decision to start a feminist book group within a political journey beginning at the UN, where she launched UN Women’s HeForShe campaign. Before discussing the aims and affordances of OSS I will therefore build on Chapter 6’s discussion of HeForShe. The campaign aims to achieve gender equality ‘in our lifetime’, providing a ‘solidarity movement’ which encourages individuals – particularly men and boys – to take the ‘HeForShe Commitment’ to ‘take action against gender bias, discrimination and violence’ (HeForShe, 2016a; UN Women, 2015). 1.7 million people have taken this commitment by completing the form seen in Figure 7.1 below on the HeForShe website.²² The ‘Take Action’ section of this website provides ideas to put commitments into practice; to ‘be the change’, ‘speak up’, or ‘get inspired’ over issues such as education, identity, and politics. The ‘politics’ section for example suggests individuals could support UN Women’s ‘Step It Up’ campaign to ‘make diversity’ of political representatives ‘a priority in your country’ (HeForShe, 2016b).

²² Figure correct as of May 2018.

Figure 7.1. The 'HeForShe Commitment' as shown on the HeForShe website

The image shows a digital form titled 'The HeForShe Commitment' on a dark background. The main heading is 'I am one of billions...' in large, bold, pink and white text. Below this is a statement: 'who believe that everyone is born free and equal. I will take action against gender bias, discrimination and violence to bring the benefits of equality to us all.' The form includes three input fields: 'Name', 'Email', and a dropdown menu for 'Please select a country'. Below these is a question: 'HeForShe believes gender isn't binary. How would you like to be counted?'. There are three radio button options: 'He', 'She', and 'You Decide'. A prominent pink button labeled 'I am HeForShe' is centered below the options. At the bottom, a small line of text states: 'By submitting your email address, you agree to receive news, stories and ideas for action from HeForShe.'

Watson acknowledged the limitations of this approach in her second speech on behalf of HeForShe, reporting men had been asking ‘what now?’ (HeForShe, 2015). She told viewers the ‘what now’ is ‘down to you’, encouraging them to continue making commitments and to report back on their progress. This speech refocused HeForShe around a new initiative, signalling what HeForShe head Elizabeth Nyamayaro described as a move from ‘awareness platform’ to ‘advocacy platform to change public policy and the law’ (Fairchild, 2014). IMPACT 10X10X10 is a commitment to ‘top-down change’, through ten ‘global leaders’ from the ‘government, the private sector, and academia’ who made ‘concrete commitments’ (UN Women, 2015). This does not afford opportunities for individual citizens to participate, outside of those implicated in organisational initiatives. The HeForShe (2016c) website provides ‘action kits’ for individuals, organizations and students to help them ‘plan and promote your own equality events’. For those who want to ‘take action’ however HeForShe does not provide a platform for discussion or collaboration with others. Twitter and #HeForShe provide opportunities for citizens to express their interest and find others who share it, with the campaign encouraging this by suggesting statements you could tweet to ‘get your friends and

followers talking about gender equality' (HeForShe, 2016b). The barriers to engaging with feminist issues through social media raise the question of how OSS may afford additional or alternative political benefits for those who accept Watson's claims to represent their interests.

While Watson (2016e) expressed that she 'didn't know what to expect' when she founded the group, its aims and structure emphasise the importance of discussion and learning. Books are selected every other month, usually by Watson though occasionally through member polls, with choices to date covering a range of topics and genres relating to feminism as Watson (2016d) attempts to 'choose works that cover as much ground as possible and are diverse'. There is a sub-folder on the discussion board for members to start and contribute to threads about each of these books, with members also afforded spaces to discuss other topics related (or unrelated) to feminism. Other sub-folders include 'feminism' (examples of topics include violence against women and gender-based stereotypes), 'intersectionality' (threads include racism in academia and cultural appropriation),²³ feminism in specific countries (popular threads discuss India and France), and 'miscellaneous' (including threads for members to introduce themselves or to share personal struggles). The forum also encourages collaboration, with sub-folders providing space for members to arrange meetups, pass books on to others, and suggest ideas or books.

The affordances of Goodreads more broadly encourage discussion and connection between members beyond the visible 'surface' of discussion forums. Members can add each other as 'friends', leave comments on their own or friends' profiles, and send and receive private messages if they opt to. Adding books to your 'shelves' on Goodreads, as

²³ Hill Collins and Bilge (2014: 2) define intersectionality as a way of understanding and analysing complexity in human experiences. This acknowledges that 'when it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other'.

well as rating books or writing reviews, also creates automated ‘status updates’ others can interact with through likes and comments.

This ability to connect with others and discuss personal and contentious issues in ‘private’ may increase the scale and scope of discussion happening as a result of OSS. While social media platforms also have rules for conduct and content, and procedures for reporting that which contravenes, the visibility and accessibility of moderators on OSS may afford more comfortable participation. The group rules emphasise its focus on discussion and learning, encouraging ‘lively debate, passionate discussion’ and ‘intellectual curiosity’, but asking for ‘respectful interactions’ (Our Shared Shelf, 2016). Members are asked to ‘refrain from hate speech, gratuitous rudeness, threats, self-promotion, and spam’; while these guidelines are open to interpretation they are given greater weight by the right of moderators to ‘remove’ posts ‘at their discretion, and to remove repeat offenders from the group’. Moderators can be seen doing both and much more, intervening to encourage members to stay on topic within threads, moving threads to the forum sub-folders they best fit, and making the majority of announcements to members even if Watson is generally responsible for introducing OSS books.

This highlights an important point. The presence and practices of OSS’ moderators may not only afford a space where members feel more comfortable, but also enable Watson to perform the representative claims detailed in Chapter 6. She is only able to perform engagement ‘from a distance’, setting the broad boundaries I argued are essential to comfortable acceptance of her claims, due to the diligent presence of other moderators. While Watson therefore clearly benefits from this set-up I now ask how citizens benefit from their engagement with OSS, and how political benefits are shaped by its aims and affordances.

7.2 Methods and Questions

The approach I took to studying OSS through online ethnography is detailed in section 6.2, where I also discuss my collection and use of fieldnotes, the members recruited for interviews, and how this data was analysed. Supporting information is provided in Appendix C. I asked all 22 members who participated to answer nine questions (also conducting follow up interviews with three participants):

1. Why did you want to join Our Shared Shelf?
2. Were you already following Emma Watson's feminist activism before (through HeForShe and/or through her social media)?
3. If so, what was it about Emma Watson and/or her activism that made you want to get involved?
4. What do you do on OSS, and what do you most enjoy about being part of it? (For example, do you read the books? Do you post messages and start threads and, if so, what do you like to discuss? Do you mostly read other people's messages?)
5. Do you think that your thoughts on feminism have changed since getting involved in OSS? Have you learned about new issues that you were not aware of before?
6. Do you now find yourself discussing feminism and related issues more often with other people, or taking any other kind of action over inequality?
7. Since joining OSS, do you feel more able to push for change on issues that matter to you? Do you feel more able to make your voice heard?
8. What other difference has being involved in OSS made in your everyday life? Is there anything else you think I need to know?
9. And finally, please tell me a little bit about yourself.

I used open coding of interview data to address the following questions, with the codes used to answer each question shown in results tables:

To what extent is OSS perceived as a community, and what is it a community *for*?

- How do participants engage with OSS?
- How do participants perceive OSS as a space?

Do participants learn as a result of engaging with OSS, and what do they learn about?

Does engagement with OSS increase political discussion, and/or participation?

I also undertook fieldwork around the Women's March in January 2017, attending the March in London with two members who participated in this research. I made fieldnotes about our participation in the protest and on how the worldwide Marches were discussed on OSS. These posts will be loosely described (so as not to identify specific members) to contextualise observations about how OSS complemented individuals' engagement with the Women's March. In addition to interviews this will be used to address the question of whether engagement with OSS leads to increased political participation.

In Chapter 6 I discussed how using interviews rather than forum posts as the foundation for analysis helps to negotiate ethical issues associated with studying online communities. I also argue that interviews are better suited to understanding how and why members engage with OSS, and what benefits they gain. While content analysis of forum posts has provided valuable evidence that online third spaces are sites of constructive political talk, our ability to draw conclusions over the benefits for citizens is limited. Graham (2010) calls for further research incorporating the perspectives of participants. Interviews enable me to explore the personal impact of engaging with discussions or sharing personal experiences (Keller et al., 2016), while avoiding the assumption that only the most 'active' members or those who participate in publically visible discussions benefit from their engagement (Hine, 2000: 24). I begin my analysis by examining *how* participants engage with OSS, and what motivates them to do so.

7.3 Analysis and Discussion

7.3.1 Motivations, Methods, and Perceptions: How Participants Engage

I have argued that Watson's performance of multiple representative claims balancing of proximity and distance from members sets 'broad boundaries', within which members

with multiple priorities but a shared suspicion of celebrity can ‘see themselves’ (Saward, 2010: 149). Having discussed Watson’s role in prompting and motivating people to join OSS in section 6.4.1, here I discuss the other factors given by participants. First I show how participants actually participate in OSS, both to avoid overstating the proportion who regularly engage in public discussions or assuming political benefits are limited to those who do so. Table 7.1 below shows the practices mentioned when I asked what participants ‘do’ on OSS.

Table 7.1. How participants engage with Our Shared Shelf

Activity	Number of participants
Reading discussion threads	21
Reading selected books	19
Posting in discussion threads (frequently)	7
Posting in discussion threads (infrequently)	6
Talking to other members elsewhere	6
Starting discussion threads	4
Passing books on to other members	3
Meeting up with other members offline	2

Note: Total number of participants = 22

OSS affords opportunities to discuss a broad range of topics (mostly) related to feminism, and almost all participants (21 of 22) told me they read discussion threads. This engagement varies, from Anna (question 4) who described reading ‘everything’ to Alyssa (question 4) who rarely visits the group itself but says she regularly ‘scans’ the email digest of posts members can receive from Goodreads. Tricia (question 4) told me she likes to ‘read other people’s messages’ but is so busy that ‘by the time I get to many of the threads I’d be interested in the discussion has already run its course’. While forums are well suited to political discussions (Graham et al., 2016a; Wright, 2012) these benefits extend to prospective readers, as even the earliest OSS discussions remain accessible. Similarly almost all participants, 19 of 22, reported reading at least some of the books selected.

While not all members who read discussions want to share their own opinions or experiences, the majority of those I interviewed have participated in discussions. I coded seven as posting in discussion threads ‘frequently’, as a routine part of their engagement, and six as posting ‘infrequently’. Louise (question 4) described preferring to discuss ‘the books and feminist issues in general...via mail rather than in the threads’, emphasising that discussions which happen *as a result of* OSS are not limited to those visible on the forum itself. Indeed six participants mentioned talking to members in other contexts, while two reported meeting others offline and three have passed on copies of books. I therefore argue that to understand how members benefit from their engagement with political discussion online we have to first understand what engagement *looks like*, which cannot be achieved through text-based methods alone. Similarly interviews enable us to ask what motivates members to engage, with Table 7.2 below showing the nine factors mentioned.

Table 7.2. What motivated participants to join Our Shared Shelf?

Motivation for joining	Number of participants
Love of reading	12
Looking for community	11
Wanting to learn	11
Emma Watson	8
Identification with feminism	8
Looking for discussion	5
Wanting to take action	4
Experience of discrimination	4
Looking to teach others	2

A love of reading motivated 12 participants, while eight noted prior identification with feminism as an incentive. For Yasmin (question 1) a book club seemed the ideal way to discuss feminism and equal rights, issues she described as ‘very key’, without making things ‘horribly political’. This suggests that Watson’s less formal modes of claim-making attract those who do not ordinarily feel comfortable discussing contentious issues, or for whom the ‘the politics of “the politicians”’ is off-putting (Tormey, 2015: 7). Indeed

the desire to ‘take action’ mentioned by four participants was often stated in relation to Donald Trump, with Rosa (question 2) telling me the shock of his election made ‘doing something’ a necessity. For four participants it was a connection between the group’s aims and their everyday experiences of discrimination, with Tricia (question 1) describing how reflecting on the ‘very specific and real experiences with sexism in my career’ drove her desire to learn about feminism. Five participants described looking for a place to discuss feminism. For Sophia (question 1) taking time to educate herself was important ‘so in turn I can educate and empower my daughters’, showing the potential impact discussions could have on participants’ everyday lives.

In keeping with Watson’s aims participants commonly associated OSS with learning, with half (11) mentioning this as motivation. For Chloe (question 1) OSS presented an opportunity to ‘educate myself a lot more through reading – especially about feminism’, while addressing her desire ‘to feel like I belonged to a community’. That half of participants came to OSS seeking a community raises the question of what members perceive it to be a community *for*. While this discussion of motivations shows a clear connection with Watson’s stated aims for the group, I now move beyond these to discuss how members themselves perceive the purpose of OSS.

Table 7.3. How participants perceive Our Shared Shelf as a space

OSS valued as	Number of participants
A community	8
A safe space to discuss feminism	8
A space to discuss issues unable to discuss elsewhere	7
A place to be exposed to new ideas and perspectives	7
A place to meet new people	5
A space to deal with difficult political events	3

Having found that half of participants came to OSS seeking a community, Table 7.3 above shows that eight participants described the group in these terms. Alex (further questions) described OSS as ‘like a second family’, while for Chloe (question 4) it was

‘comforting’ to be ‘part of a wider group of people keen on educating themselves about other lives’. Perceptions of what OSS is a community *for* were often linked to discussion and learning. Eight participants described OSS as a safe space to discuss feminism, and seven as a space to discuss issues they felt unable to discuss elsewhere. For Michelle (question 4) the search for ‘open-minded discussion’ meant while ‘different opinions are definitely not a bad thing’, she was looking for a place where others believe ‘feminism and social issues are important’. The foregrounded aim of OSS as a *feminist* book club is clearly important here, as this is not simply a desire for community but a community of like-minded others.

The group is most frequently seen as a safe space for discussing and reading about feminism in comparison to other online platforms, most frequently but not exclusively social media. Tricia (question 2) described supporting celebrity feminists like Watson because of ‘the abuse and vitriol these women go through’ which made her ‘not willing to be so active’ herself, while Maria (question 2) opts to avoid social media altogether. It is not just discussing feminism or sharing personal experiences on social media that can be uncomfortable, but engaging with feminist issues more broadly. Stephanie (question 8) told me she is ‘careful about what I read as I find the bile that some people spit out to be horrible and diminishing’, while Alyssa (further questions) described OSS as ‘a very good antidote to all of those trolling, hateful comments that you get posted...to any article that kinda challenges anything about patriarchy’. While I do not disagree that social media platforms afford valuable opportunities for feminist self-expression and activism (Cochrane, 2013), the association of these platforms with misogynistic hate speech makes a discussion forum dedicated to feminist issues a valuable addition or alternative.

The comparatively comfortable context of OSS does not remove all barriers to opinion sharing. While Amber (question 4) described OSS as ‘less intimidating’ than Facebook and news sites she still worries that ‘comments can be taken in the wrong way’,

while Chloe (question 4) likes ‘the format of being in an online group’ but remains ‘nervous about sharing my views’. As some don’t simply avoid actively discussing feminism on social media but avoid such discussions altogether, I argue benefits remain to engagement with the group for members who choose not to contribute to public discussions.

OSS’ explicit focus on feminism does not just provide an alternative to social media, but a space eight participants described as affording opportunities to discuss issues they cannot in other everyday contexts. Olivia (question 4) valued the chance to discuss ‘subjects that mean something to me that I wouldn’t often do outside the forums’, while for Paul (question 4) participating in discussions was something ‘I would never have done’ elsewhere. The opportunity to engage with ‘stimulating conversation’ on issues of personal importance (Maria, question 1) is particularly valued by those who feel ‘isolated’ due to illness, disability, occupational status or location (Chloe, question 1). These benefits extend to those who feel *politically* isolated, either from everyday networks or their local or national communities. Alex (further questions) described comfort in feeling part of a community and knowing there ‘are still people who I share values with and opinions, and I can turn to them and write to them’ when frustrated with political discussions elsewhere in daily life. This sense of needing an ‘inclusive’ space to discuss politics, and feminism in particular, with like-minded others was expressed most strongly by American participants following Trump’s election (Isabella, question 1). Michelle described feeling that ‘I just don’t belong in the place I’ve lived my whole life’, taking comfort in having ‘a place to read about issues important to me’ as those around her ‘have very different opinions on politics and social issues than I do’ (email correspondence; question 8).

While this sense of community is therefore based on shared values, Table 7.2 shows participants were just as likely to describe coming to OSS seeking to learn. Table

7.3 above shows that seven participants see the group as a place to be exposed to new ideas and different perspectives. Rosa (question 8) told me she ‘had the feeling I need to open myself to ideas coming from new people’, while Michelle (question 4) agreed OSS is a ‘positive platform to read about different ideas and other people’s experiences’. This raises the question of whether OSS’ explicit focus on feminism limits this exchange of ideas, and therefore opportunities for political learning.

7.3.2 (What) do Members Learn from their Engagement?

Table 7.4 below shows that over half of participants (13 of 22) feel they have learned about feminist issues from their engagement with OSS, with eight reporting that their thoughts have changed as a result. OSS’ explicit focus on feminism does not, therefore, create an environment where discussion does not foster learning. Looking at what participants learn *about*, it is clear that the political benefits of engagement are shaped not only by the group’s aims but also, supporting Graham et al.’s (2016a) findings, the finer details of its structure and culture. I argue that rather than members’ desires for a community of like-minded others and to learn from these ‘others’ being contradictory, in this case broad similarity (through shared values) affords a space in which it feels safer to discuss difference.

Table 7.4. (What) do participants learn through Our Shared Shelf?

Participant feels they have learned	Number of participants
About feminist issues in general	13
Leading their thoughts on feminism to change	8
From international perspectives	8
From intersectional perspectives	5
About new issues	4
To spot sexism in their everyday life	3

While a majority reported learning responses were as varied as participants themselves, from Stephanie (question 5) who told me her ‘feminism is long rooted and nothing on OSS has changed it’ to Chloe (question 5) who told me her ‘thoughts on feminism have completely changed’. Of course learning and opinion-change are not

interchangeable, with Sophia (question 5) telling me that though her opinions haven't changed 'I've become more aware of issues both locally and nationally'. That a greater number of participants reported learning through OSS than regularly contribute to discussions supports my argument that political benefits are not limited to members whose participation is 'visible'. Situating discussion within a book group further encourages and affords learning. Amber (question 5) attributed feeling 'more knowledgeable' largely to the non-fiction books selected, enabling her to learn 'more about feminism around the world'. Hannah and Chloe attributed change in their views to books read through OSS, with Chloe describing a 'changed worldview' from opening 'my mind and heart to the experiences of women throughout the world' (question 5; 8). As Table 7.4 above shows eight participants described learning from international perspectives, suggesting further ways the benefits of engagement are influenced by the structure of the forum.

In addition to learning about the lives of women in other countries to them, as I will now discuss, five participants reported learning about intersectionality or about communities they do not belong to themselves. These two broad topics most frequently noted by participants correspond to two of the group's sub-forums, those dedicated to intersectionality and to discussing feminism in specific countries. While participants were drawn to OSS by a shared interest in feminism, learning is afforded by their different locations and life experiences. Members told me they had learned from members from other countries who shared news they would not normally see, and discussed gender inequality and personal experiences of sexism in their countries. Bianca (question 8) told me 'getting involved in OSS gives me the opportunity to know about what is going around in other countries', while a participant who had moved for work 'really enjoyed' the thread dedicated to discussing feminism in her new country (Clara, question 8).

Discussion threads devoted to intersectionality, and books selected for discussion by Watson, led to five participants reporting they had learned about other marginalised communities and about people whose experiences of discrimination are different to their own. This benefits members who previously ‘knew nothing about intersectional feminism’ (Olivia, question 5) but also those who told me they had already learned a lot ‘through feminist blogs and Tumblr’ but still ‘have a lot to learn’ (Clara, question 5). Learning is afforded by members sharing individual experiences and knowledge, with Alex telling me ‘we tend to have experts in certain fields, which I think is really cool’ (further questions). Maria (question 5) who was ‘raised in the 50s’ told me OSS had really ‘raised my awareness of the entire gender issues’, though she is reluctant to participate in discussions for fear she is ‘probably still ignorant’. Others reported learning about ableism, heteronormativity and ageism. For Alyssa (further questions) it was simply reassuring to see older and younger members discussing feminism to show her the idea in political commentary these groups hold opposing values is ‘not always true’.

While participants often focused on learning about other people, or issues new to them (four participants), three described being more able to spot sexism in everyday life. Claudia told me ‘I am way more aware of sexism and discrimination around me because I pay more attention’ (question 5), while Yasmin agreed ‘learning about feminism has made me more aware of how I am treated in society’ (question 6). While only three participants mentioned this unprompted this shows that in spite of its political aims OSS affords ‘aha’ moments, described by Graham et al. as members realising they are ‘not alone’ and that personal concerns are political problems (2016a: 1368). This raises the question of whether members feel more able to deal with or take action against experiences of discrimination as a result. These are questions I consider in the final section of analysis on political discussion, efficacy, and participation.

7.3.3 Does Engagement lead to Increased Discussion and Participation?

In Chapter 6 I discussed how for the minority of participants who are fans, Emma Watson's representative claims hold particular significance. Relating to Watson led to connecting her political statements to personal experiences, as is shown through participants' reflections on her speech to launch HeForShe. Alex described a 'click moment' leaving her 'full of energy', having stayed up late to watch 'my baby' give 'a speech at the UN' (question 1; further questions). She reflected, following criticism that 'you're only a feminist because Emma Watson is one', that she had been a feminist 'forever' but 'realised it when she gave the speech'. Similarly Anna (question 2; 3) showed a clear affective connection to Watson and was 'moved' by her story, reflecting 'truly I was crying hearing that speech'. The speech provided a turning point to an even greater extent for Matthew (further questions), who had not previously considered himself a feminist but felt that 'Emma spoke to me'. He reported subsequently taking action, contacting 'men and women over the world involved in various projects through social media', but feels HeForShe is most valuable as 'a vehicle to feminism'. In this context OSS provided 'a way to realise my HeForShe commitment' and a 'platform to discuss' his 'new found world view', with Matthew (further questions) concluding that 'once again Emma came through with Goodreads'.

For members who have an affective connection to Watson OSS provides a valuable 'next step' to share their experiences and opinions, having been drawn to feminist activism through her more formal political work. The forum has also, as I will discuss, provided opportunities for co-participation that would be difficult to achieve through HeForShe alone. OSS therefore complements Watson's more formal modes of claim-making by providing greater opportunities for engagement at the individual level, providing some answer to the 'what now?' question Watson herself noted arising from her widely-viewed UN speech (HeForShe, 2015). While these represent the most

dedicated fans other participants mentioned actions which could be attributed to Watson, such as Chloe (question 6) who was ‘drawn to HeForShe’ and fellow recruit Christopher (question 6) who told me he ‘gave donations to various causes thanks to Emma’. For Yasmin (question 3) Watson - along with author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie - was noteworthy for being ‘able to educate me on what feminism is’ and making her ‘want to get involved in making people understand the true meaning of equality and why we need it’. The benefits of engagement are not limited to Watson fans, even if they describe some of the greatest shifts in their perception of themselves as feminists and activists. Participants reported both discussing feminism more frequently than before *and* doing so with greater confidence.

Table 7.5. Political efficacy, discussion, and participation among participants

Since joining OSS participant has experienced	Number of participants
Increased discussion of feminism (outside of OSS)	11
Increased confidence in discussions	11
Increased efficacy	9
Increased participation	8
Intention to participate in the future	8

Table 7.5 above shows half of participants (11) described discussing feminism more frequently in everyday life outside of OSS. Louise (question 6) for example told me she now talks ‘frequently’ about feminist literature and issues and ‘I’m more frequently sharing content related to feminism with friends on social media’. Increased confidence reported by the same number was, for many, inspired by feeling more knowledgeable. Chloe (question 6) reflected ‘before joining OSS, I sometimes got myself into situations where I was arguing for feminism without being fully educated...Now I feel more confident to talk’. OSS provides a ‘practicing ground’ for political conversations and resources from other members and books to use elsewhere, another benefit available to those who do not engage in public discussions. Matthew (question 7) described OSS as

‘a safe place for people to discuss gender equality questions which may be sensitive. A good sounding board for difficult conversations’. Clara (question 7) reported putting this into practice, telling me ‘the forum helps me to practice and find arguments that are easy to understand’. Sophia (question 6) described feeling more confident because you’re ‘not as afraid to speak openly or debate when you can quote/list reputable sources/information’, with Alex (question 6) telling me she uses ‘the books we read and members’ comments as arguments’. For those who follow Watson beyond OSS her representative claims provide further content for re-use. I noticed Alex often using quotes and phrases from her speeches; she told me while it was ‘still not really *easy*’, Watson’s activism had made it ‘easier for sure’ to talk about gender equality.

Nine participants reported feeling greater efficacy, an increased sense that they can push for change on issues of personal importance. Louise (question 7) and Hannah (question 6) reported an important shift in their ability to create small changes in everyday life, by ‘getting people to think differently and raise awareness’ as a first step to ‘prevent injustice’ or by encouraging friends to ‘not let the world tell them their worth’. ‘I guess’, Hannah continued, ‘if you spend time with people who believe what you believe in, you find the courage to speak up’. In Yasmin’s case (question 7), she hoped becoming ‘much more confident with pushing for change’ would mean people ‘will listen to what I have to say’. While there are tangible political benefits to engagement increased efficacy alone cannot remove barriers to participation, nor is increased confidence a guaranteed by-product for those like Amber (question 7) for whom an online community was appealing in part due to shyness. Alex (question 7) described finding it ‘easier to push for change because I now have qualitative examples’ but did not feel more ‘heard’ outside of OSS, while Tricia (question 6) remained ‘pessimistic’ due to a ‘white male boss’ who ‘listens politely but not much more’ as she attempts to address concerns about a lack of diversity in her company.

Eight participants reported that their participation in campaigns or other means of pushing for change had increased since joining OSS, with eight telling me they intended to participate more in the future. For Matthew (question 8), who told me ‘OSS has made me an activist in all aspects of my life’, the group has had a profound influence. Claudia (question 7) now feels ‘able to speak out more, mostly about the little things in everyday life like a sexist commercial or statement someone made’, and told me ‘I am thinking about pushing feminism on a bigger scale like joining an organisation’. Clara (question 6) told me that after reading *Half The Sky* she has considered ‘lending money with micro-loans through organizations like Kiva’, with Chloe (question 6) also reportedly ‘looking into what I can do to help...OSS has given me ideas and inspiration to follow up’. Alex (question 6) told me ‘I plan on taking action over inequality, I think in the future you might see me demonstrating here in Austria or elsewhere for our rights’. For some, the opportunity to demonstrate came in January 2017 as the Women’s March in Washington DC inspired sister protests around the world.

Just as Donald Trump motivated some to join OSS became a space to discuss his election, and the over 600 protests organised around the world that formed what Chadwick (2017: 248) describes as a ‘counter-inauguration’. Watson attended the march in Washington DC, using social media as I discussed in Chapter 6 to not only mediate her own participation but act as an ‘authentic ambassador’ for followers. Looking at how the March was discussed, I find OSS provided members with a (further) sense of connection to a global movement. As I monitored discussion about the upcoming protests I noticed Anna was sharing the message of the movement, and inviting others to join her in London. I contacted her through Goodreads and joined her and Matthew for the March to Trafalgar Square, which drew a crowd of around 100,000 (BBC News, 2017). Other members had also intended to meet us, but the size of the crowd prevented this.

The Women's March was Anna's (question 6) first protest and she told me 'I already know that is not the last one', demonstrating this when she again travelled over 300 miles to join the March4Women in London in March 2017. While Anna told me she does not find meeting new people difficult, being able to march with other OSS members was an incentive to protest as she enjoyed the opportunity to meet 'people with the same passion in life'. This was a welcome change from her sense that those around her in everyday life 'live in stereotypes' and 'tell me it is not worth fighting'. Anna's passion for HeForShe is shared by Matthew, and both wore HeForShe T-shirts to the March (in Anna's case one she made herself featuring an image of and quote by Watson). Anna used #HeForShe as she mediated her view of the protest through the Periscope app, making a connection between the protest and the movement. Through OSS, Watson fans who became engaged with feminist issues through her institutional-level activism are afforded opportunities to connect. Matthew (further questions) expressed hope he could encourage HeForShe to engage with current political issues and protests to give men who 'signed up' a 'focal point', and also that he could 'get them involved with Goodreads'. For Matthew, who told me the Women's March was his first protest 'since the anti-war marches of the Blair era', OSS has provided a 'next step' enabling him to put his HeForShe commitment into practice.

Having a platform to discuss and share information held political benefits for members more broadly.²⁴ Both Olivia (question 6) and Clara (further questions) connected their participation in a march to OSS, with Clara telling me 'I think I wouldn't have heard of the march before Saturday without OSS!' Clara described enjoying 'looking at pictures people took at the different protests all around the world', raising the question of whether OSS also provided additional opportunities for members to engage

²⁴ As I show in Appendix C, the majority of interviews took place prior to the Women's March protests of January 2017. Olivia and Anna returned their questionnaires after this while Matthew, Alex and Clara answered further questions following this event. I therefore draw on their references to the protests in interviews, in addition to my broader observation of discussion on OSS itself.

with the movement. For Matthew who described marching with other members as ‘validating’ OSS brought the ‘global nature of the movement into focus’ (further questions), while for Alex who could not attend a protest being part of discussions made her feel ‘in some sense’ like ‘being part of the march’ (further questions). I therefore argue that OSS provided a further platform for citizens to feel connection with ‘geographically distant others’ (Chadwick, 2017). While Chadwick (2017: 249) demonstrates the importance of this at a collective level, enabling ‘*global* networks of people’ to become a ‘simultaneous’ force opposing Trump, this study demonstrates the significance to the *individuals* able to engage with this force through online platforms.

Table 7.6. Number of posts in Women’s March thread showing engagement

Type of post	Number of posts
Members saying they will attend or had attended a march	41
Sharing information about marches	13
Expressing pride about marches	14
Noting Emma’s attendance at the march	8
Thanking other members who marched	8

Note: Total number of posts in thread = 120. This was the largest thread about the Women’s March on OSS but I observed four others.

These benefits can be seen on the forum itself. Table 7.6 above shows how members used the largest (but not only) thread about the Women’s March to discuss the global event, giving further indication of how the group can supplement other forms of participation. Of the 120 posts on this thread 41 were by members stating they would be attending or had attended a march, with some sharing their personal motivations or their intentions to keep participating in gender equality activism. Others expressed keen interest in hearing from those who had attended protests. A smaller number (13 posts) used this thread to share information on the locations of protests, where members could watch speeches online, or on the purpose and motivations of the movement. A couple of members who posted that they were nervous about protesting found encouragement,

while connection to a broader movement could be seen in the 14 posts expressing pride and eight which thanked others for their participation.

While the thread described here is hardly large-scale discussion for a group with over 200,000 members, OSS provided a valuable platform for members who attended protests to share their experiences and for those who did not to engage with this global event. Members continued to share information and links to news stories covering the protests and information on further protests, while a new thread was started for members to discuss their plans to continue to participate. OSS not only provides a ‘safer’ space for citizens to engage with feminist activism, but the slower pace of forums as described by Graham et al. (2016a) is well-suited to addressing the ‘what now?’ question which follows large-scale attention to a political cause (HeForShe, 2015).

While not mentioning Watson Clara told me ‘it felt good to see some selfies of celebs that attended’ marches, as it is ‘always good to promote the cause ;-)’ (further questions). While Table 7.6 shows that discussion was not focused on Watson, her use of social media to mediate her own participation added to members’ sense of excitement and was particularly meaningful for fans. Alex told me she was ‘super excited’ after seeing on Twitter that Watson was marching, adding ‘one can clearly see just how proud her mum is of her, and so am I’ (further questions). For Matthew Watson ‘taking her mum along also showed it is a personal thing something she cares deeply about’ (further questions), showing further support for Inthorn and Street’s (2011: 482) finding that citizens use ‘clues’ from celebrities’ personal lives to judge their ‘genuineness’. Matthew described a sense that ‘I was marching with Emma, all be it in a different city’, making a personal connection to Watson’s mediated protest.

This analysis has shown that it is the connections members are able to make to each other, as well as between political events and personal experiences, which makes engagement with Emma Watson’s online feminist book group politically valuable. While

for the most active members like Alex the group provides a ‘platform’ for self-expression lacking in other everyday contexts (further questions), members who never post publically can still benefit from access to these discussions and gain greater confidence to engage elsewhere. While the Women’s March shows OSS can complement members’ engagement with global political events the platform also enables engagement with feminist issues which is ‘everyday’, both in its affordances and in its distance from formal politics (Highfield, 2016).

7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have asked how those who accepted Emma Watson’s invitation to ‘join up and participate’ in her feminist book group and discussion forum benefit from their engagement (Our Shared Shelf, 2016), and how these benefits are shaped by its aims and affordances. Of the 22 members I interviewed, who demonstrated varied levels of engagement both with the group and its celebrity founder, a majority reported having learned from their participation. Members reported talking about feminism more frequently outside of the group, often as a result of increased confidence and access to resources, and participating or intending to participate in political action more frequently. In the quote that opens this chapter O’Donnell (2017: 116) argues that while Watson’s actions on behalf of OSS ‘make for good news stories’, reading feminist books ‘does not equate to action in the real world’. While my discussion of Watson’s use of social media as a resource in Chapter 6 certainly shows she accumulates celebrity capital through OSS, Watson is not alone in benefitting from the group and the political benefits for members cannot be so readily dismissed.

While OSS’ aim to encourage discussion of feminist issues means it does not neatly fit the definition of a non-political ‘third space’ (Wright, 2012), through a focus on discussing books and sharing ‘everyday’ experiences it retains sufficient distance from formal politics to afford comfortable engagement. That the ‘shared tie’ (Graham, 2016b)

members deliberately seek out in joining OSS is a political one does not prevent members from fulfilling their other widely shared aim of learning. Exploring what members learn *about* from their engagement I find support for the argument that it is not only the broad aims of a platform which shape the nature of political discussions, but its structure and culture (Graham et al., 2016a). In addition to actively encouraging members to discuss different cultures and communities, broadly shared values among members and the culture fostered by active moderation hold particular significance in the context of *feminist* political discussion. Members describe the group as a safer space for this than other online platforms, particularly social media, but also as providing opportunities for discussion which are not forthcoming in other everyday contexts.

Considering my work around OSS as a whole it is clear that it is not only members who benefit from the affordances of the group, but also its celebrity founder. For those to whom Watson's claims to represent feminists are most meaningful, her fans, OSS provides a valuable next step in a journey which began when they 'saw themselves' in the stories she shared with the UN general assembly and millions of viewers (Saward, 2010: 149). An online book group and discussion forum - both more distant from formal politics and from Watson herself - affords political benefits to members beyond highly engaged fans. Watson's ability to 'perform engagement' with OSS from a distance while still affording everyday opportunities for engagement to members is possible only due to its platform on Goodreads, and the persistence of moderators. What is therefore clear in this case is that the media and technology used by celebrities as they intervene in the political field not only influences how their representative claims are evaluated, but the potential for citizens to benefit from them.

8. Conclusion

In this thesis I have addressed the question of how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital. In doing so I have sought to understand how celebrities attempt to obtain the ‘power of mobilisation’ afforded by recognition in the political field (Bourdieu, 1991: 190). Setting out to explore the exchangeability of celebrity capital in contrasting political contexts, I came up against the limitations of this concept. While an agent’s celebrity capital may enable them to cross field boundaries, the ability of celebrities to ‘convert their fame into a political power’ cannot simply be explained by how recognisable they are (Driessens, 2013: 549). Through case studies I therefore sought to identify the ‘missing link’ that facilitates the exchange of celebrity capital for political capital.

These cases demonstrate that the value of celebrity capital in the political field is predicated on successfully claiming to represent others. I therefore argue that Driessens’ (2013) concept of celebrity capital has greater explanatory power in political contexts when combined with Saward’s (2010) theory of representative claims. The key contribution of this thesis is a model that integrates these theories, to explain how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital (see Figure 8.1 below). While this model advances our understanding of how celebrities work across the fields of entertainment and politics, it remains clear that some face greater barriers to doing so than others.

This thesis therefore assessed what factors influence this process of claim-making and exchange, contributing to our knowledge of when celebrities are more likely to be accepted as legitimate political actors (Arthurs and Little, 2016; Inthorn and Street, 2011; Ribke, 2015). I argue that possessing high celebrity capital - particularly where combined with a large social media audience - supports claims to represent a tangible constituency. However I find that acceptance of celebrities’ representative claims is also influenced by

three other key factors: class, connection to formal politics, and consistency of self-presentation.

Finally I have also contributed to academic debate over the democratic implications of celebrity politics, assessing the outcomes of this process beyond whether a celebrity is able to obtain political capital. My case studies demonstrate that celebrity campaigns *can* achieve beneficial outcomes for citizens, and provide valuable opportunities for engagement and political self-expression. Beyond this, I argue there is inherent value in feeling that someone with high celebrity capital is representing your interests to others. However such benefits can come at the expense of others. While I argue celebrities *can* legitimately represent citizens' interests, those lacking connection to non-partisan institutions seek to secure political capital by capitalising on distrust in elected representatives.

In this concluding chapter, I draw on my cases studies to consider these overarching questions of exchangeability, context, and consequences in turn. In section 8.5 I then set out the other contributions these case studies make to a range of academic literatures. Finally I bring this thesis to a close by considering the limitations of my research, and questions it raises for further consideration of the relationship between celebrity, representation, and power. Before setting out my key contributions, I first make a case for why they are significant.

8.1 Why Do Celebrity Claims to Represent Citizens Matter?

The question of how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital matters because the process of movement between the fields of entertainment and politics always implicates citizens. It is important to consider the consequences for those celebrities claim to represent, or who 'see themselves' as being represented (Saward, 2010: 149). Furthermore celebrities position themselves as political representatives through reference - and often in opposition - to politicians and political institutions. This raises the question

of how celebrities disrupt the make-up of a field where symbolic capital is drawn from trust granted by groups (Bourdieu, 1991).

In section 2.1, I discussed debate over the democratic impact of celebrity politics. Countering West and Orman's (2003: 2) conclusion celebrities 'risk the short-circuiting of representative democracy', others have argued they offer 'alternative' means of 'contemporary political engagement' (Drake and Higgins, 2006: 100; Wheeler, 2013: 170). These broad questions have rarely been addressed empirically, and are indeed difficult to do so. I argue a narrower approach, that considers celebrities as prospective political representatives, provides a constructive basis for considering the relationship between celebrity and politics.

The capacity for celebrities to represent citizens, and consequences of their claims to do so, is relevant in a context of declining trust in and satisfaction with elected representatives (Clarke et al., 2016; Hay, 2007, Stoker, 2006; Tormey, 2015). Tormey's (2015: 2) argument it is a 'sign of how desperate matters have become' citizens would supposedly rather 'listen to' a 'millionaire' like 'Russell Brand' is understandable. However celebrity representative claims are contested to greater degree than this suggests. More importantly, I argue that citizens can not only *be* listened to but also *feel listened to* by celebrities. Street (2004: 447) suggested it is 'at least conceivable that unelected persons', including celebrities, 'may legitimately represent politically the views and values of others'. I argue this is not only possible, but *can* be beneficial for those who consider themselves or their interests to be represented in the public sphere by someone with high celebrity capital.

Celebrities who lack a connection to formal, non-partisan political institutions however draw on populist rhetoric to position themselves among citizens. There is a continued need to pay attention to celebrities who 'tap into' anti-political sentiment to

obtain political capital (Tormey, 2015: 2), and ask whether this exacerbates a tendency to ‘assume the worst of political actors’ (Hay, 2007: 90; Stoker, 2006). While I have argued - by demonstrating connections between Bourdieu and Saward in Chapter 3 - that celebrities obtain political capital through accepted representative claims, the role of media in their evaluation raises concern for further consideration. West and Orman (2003: 14) argue it is the ‘American mass media’ which ‘legitimises’ celebrities by deeming their opinions to be ‘important’. Considering celebrities as representatives I argue this is an oversimplification, neglecting capacity for citizens to ‘read back’ claims (Saward, 2010: 53). We *have* seen however that celebrities can obtain political capital on the ‘assumption’ they are ‘representatives of popular opinion’ rather than through overt acceptance from citizens (Street, 2004: 447). There is therefore certainly the potential for celebrities to *misrepresent* citizens in the public sphere, and for celebrities to obtain political capital without the clear acceptance of apparent constituents.

While Tormey (2015) argues citizens do not wish to be ‘spoken for’, I find where celebrities successfully negotiate their distance both from politicians and constituents they can provide a valued source of representation. Celebrities can afford the more ‘immediate’ forms of activism Tormey argues citizens value (2015: 92), complementing a shift toward more ‘everyday’ forms of engagement where politics, popular culture and everyday life intersect (Highfield, 2016). Wheeler (2012: 421; 2013: 170) argues celebrities can have ‘democratic worth’ where they establish ‘fixed meanings’ and enable citizens to ‘participate in terms of their own efficacy’. In practice this means celebrity claims possess greatest potential where they establish spaces for citizens to engage on their own terms, within broad but clearly defined boundaries.

The capacity for celebrities to enable citizens to ‘achieve a real sense of connection’ with political causes is an important debate (Wheeler, 2013: 171). While Inthorn and Street (2011: 481) suggest ‘certain celebrities have the potential to connect

citizens with a political cause', others have found those most interested in celebrity are most distant from political debates (Brockington, 2014; Couldry and Markham, 2007). On this basis Brockington (2014: 155) asks whether celebrities might be 'more productive' if used to 'narrow-cast' causes to fans, a suggestion supported by Thrall et al.'s (2008) argument that celebrity advocates rarely attract sustained mainstream media attention.

My case studies suggest the potential for celebrities to target claims to mobilise 'those who admire them' may not provide the opportunities we would assume (Street, 2004: 449). Those tweeting about Martin Freeman largely ignored his starring role in the Labour campaign, while members of Emma Watson's feminist book group were less likely to be fans of hers than I had anticipated. This thesis supports previous findings over 'third person effects' (Brubaker, 2011), with citizens generally believing celebrities influence 'other people' but not themselves. I build on this by arguing that for celebrities to connect citizens with political causes, and exchange celebrity capital for political capital, 'narrowcasting' alone is not an option. With the political value of celebrity capital contingent on acceptance the celebrity speaks for others, even by those who accept that the celebrity speaks for them personally, the celebrity must be seen to attract broader attention.

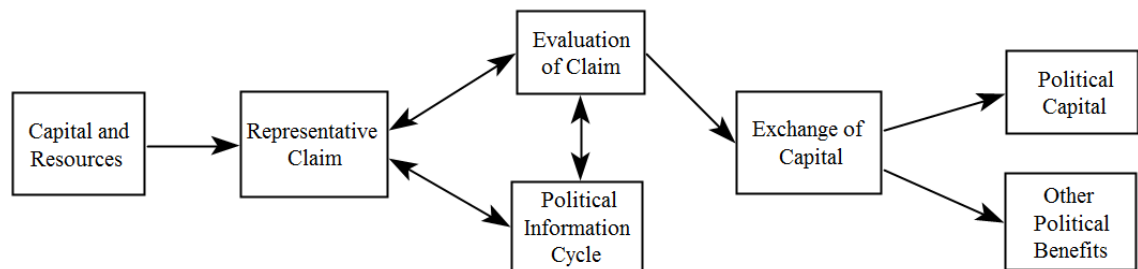
In Chapter 1 I set out the three overarching research questions this thesis sought to address. Drawing on the case studies presented in Chapters 4-7 I now address each of these in turn, considering the key contributions this thesis makes to our understanding of the relationship between celebrity and politics.

8.2 How can Celebrity Capital be Exchanged for Political Capital?

I began seeking to understand how celebrities intervene in the political field. While agreeing with Driessens (2013) that it is logical to conceptualise celebrity as a form of capital to account for the movement of celebrities between fields, I wanted to understand

how this works in a political context. As I conducted research on celebrity interventions in contrasting political contexts, the interplay between celebrity, politics and representation became increasingly clear. The key contribution of this thesis is a model for explaining how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital, developed inductively through case studies. This model - which is set out in full in Chapter 3 - can be seen in Figure 8.1 below. In this section I consider how each of my case studies demonstrates this process in practice.

Figure 8.1. Explaining how Celebrity Capital is Exchanged for Political Capital



8.2.1 Chapter 4: Russell Brand Claims to Represent Housing Activists

Chapter 4 demonstrates the inherent interconnection between celebrity capital and representative claims. Brand negotiated his role in the New Era campaign as to represent residents, while debate over his right to be involved centred on whom – if anyone - he spoke for. While Brand’s claims did not go uncontested he received overt acceptance from New Era residents, and supportive tweets enabled both Brand and journalists to declare his broader acceptance. As a result, Brand was able to exchange celebrity capital for political capital.

Brand brought high celebrity capital and highly followed social media accounts to this process. Other ‘background factors’ included his high economic capital (Saward, 2010: 72), and the swift trajectory through which he accumulated this (Bourdieu, 1987). Brand came to the campaign with an existing set of ‘meanings’ (McCracken, 1989), including roles as an actor and comedian but also his combative relationship with British

tabloids. Brand foregrounded his media resources, intending to ‘amplify’ New Era through his YouTube series but also by attracting positive mainstream media coverage. ‘Amplification’ was also a rhetorical strategy to negotiate distance from constituents who did not share his economic capital, alongside use of his working-class background to demonstrate ‘descriptive similarity’ to residents (Saward, 2010: 100). Brand constructed claims in opposition to political elites, justifying his presence by claiming the campaign was not being represented by anyone else.

This case demonstrates that the process of claim-making and evaluation cannot be separated from political information cycles. Following contestation from the tabloid press on the grounds of his wealth, the political information cycle became dominated not by New Era but by debate over Brand’s right to represent them. While Brand was unable to use social media to control media coverage these resources supported claims to represent a tangible, accepting constituency. Most importantly Brand could demonstrate overt acceptance of his claims by New Era, and constructing claims at a distance enabled broader acceptance from protestors and supporters with a range of political priorities. ‘Reading back’ of Brand’s claims as a wealthy celebrity to represent working-class Londoners did not, therefore, prevent exchange of celebrity capital for political capital.

The sale of the estate was reported as success for residents but also victory, vindication, and validation for Brand, demonstrating he had obtained political capital. Brand had also received crucial – and crucially public - recognition from residents and anti-austerity campaigners throughout, enabling acceptance his high celebrity capital had political value because he spoke for others. Brand demonstrates that controversy and contestation do not necessarily prevent exchange; you must, however, be able to demonstrate acceptance in response.

8.2.2 Chapter 5: Celebrities Claim to Represent the British Electorate

Chapter 5 demonstrates celebrity capital is considered to be of low political value, but is *attributed value* through accepted claims to represent others. This study of celebrity endorsements of the Labour Party in 2015 showed that this process works differently in closer proximity to political elites, where celebrities are evaluated against hierarchical political and cultural norms to a greater degree. Paradoxically demonstrating ability to accumulate high celebrity capital was more important to exchanging this, as potential strategic benefits for politicians formed the sole justification for accepting celebrity interventions. Claims were difficult to sustain against ‘reading back’ from journalists, and I argue none of the four celebrities studied successfully exchanged celebrity capital for political capital.

While Martin Freeman, Jo Brand, Steve Coogan and Russell Brand brought different resources and capital to this process, there were key similarities in how they constructed claims. Celebrities made ‘performances of authenticity’ by presenting endorsements as motivated by personal ‘values’, positioning themselves among citizens assumed to share these values to construct distance from politicians. While celebrity capital is the most important ‘background factor’ in this context celebrities did not ‘foreground’ it, constructing claims based on ‘ordinariness’.

Such claims were vulnerable to ‘reading back’ on the basis of wealth, and in spite of being shared on social media endorsements were unable to ‘bypass’ negative media coverage. While the support of ‘Hollywood star’ Martin Freeman was seen to possess potential strategic benefits, the exchangeability of his high celebrity capital was undermined by interventions from Conservative-supporting journalists linking him to tax avoidance. In this elite context celebrities also negotiated political norms privileging ‘seriousness’ (Inthorn and Street, 2011), with Steve Coogan’s claims ‘read back’ on the

grounds of ‘inappropriate’ behaviour and Labour’s supporters dismissed as a ‘bunch of comedians’ (Turner and Holehouse, 2015).

While celebrity claims are easily undermined by negative media coverage, endorsements *must* spark political information cycles for claims to be accepted. As media coverage of Russell Brand focused on whether Ed Miliband was right to be interviewed by the controversial comedian, Brand’s political credibility hinged on acceptance he spoke for his large social media audience. This was clearest after Brand officially endorsed Labour and was no longer perceived, due to inconsistency with previous political statements, to represent this constituency. Jo Brand in contrast made the most consistent claims, having exclusively endorsed Labour and grounded her endorsement in experience as an NHS nurse. Brand was judged more frequently and more personally, often through misogynistic dismissals of her credibility on the grounds of appearance or age. Her greatest barrier to obtaining political capital however was the lack of celebrity capital accumulated through her intervention, meaning Jo Brand’s endorsement was evaluated as holding little-to-no strategic value.

8.2.3 Chapters 6 and 7: Emma Watson Claims to Represent Feminists

This study of Emma Watson’s claims to represent feminists - including members of her online book group Our Shared Shelf (OSS) - demonstrates the resources that provide strongest support for celebrity representative claims. It also shows that when it comes to exchanging celebrity capital for political capital scale *does* matter, as Watson’s high celebrity capital is a key element of her broad acceptance. However it is Watson’s consistent self-presentation, proximity to (non-partisan) political institutions and ‘appropriate’ middle-class background that enable her to accumulate and exchange celebrity capital with greater ease than others.

To an even greater extent than Russell Brand Watson brought a wealth of media resources to this process, including one of the most highly followed Instagram accounts

in the world. Watson's high economic capital had not been accumulated at such sharp trajectory however, her middle-class background part of her consistent self-presentation across fields and platforms. Watson possesses 'connection' to political institutions as a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, and unlike other celebrities did not use populist language to position herself in opposition to political elites. Watson uses these resources to construct three types of claim to represent OSS members, negotiating her distance by 'performing engagement' with the group through social media.

The broad boundaries of Watson's claims afford acceptance from OSS members beyond those who identify as her fans. Her acceptance is also facilitated by her connection to formal politics and 'appropriate' self-presentation, as members express discomfort with celebrity in general but accept her as an exception. While Watson's continued association with smart schoolgirl Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* films occasionally results in 'reading back' from journalists when she transgresses this image, it ultimately affords her further valuable consistency. Watson is uniquely able to use social media to spark political information cycles on her own terms, attracting positive attention to her claims to represent feminists and further supporting her broad acceptance as a credible political actor.

8.3 What Key Factors Influence this Process?

Saward (2010: 94) argues that while the unelected can benefit from constraints placed on elected representatives, they must 'work harder to make their representative claims convincing'. I find celebrities must also negotiate 'stigma associated with celebrities in politics' (Brubaker, 2011: 29), but some must work harder to achieve this than others. Having set out the process enabling exchange of celebrity capital for political capital, I now discuss the four key factors I argue influence celebrities' ability to achieve this.

8.3.1 Celebrity Capital and Social Media

Panis and Van den Bulck (2012: 88) argue when ‘it comes to being recognised by the general population as a celebrity supporter’ of campaigns, ‘the more famous the better’. As Driessens (2013) notes however, recognisability does not necessarily bring *recognition*. I have argued both that celebrity capital is inherently seen as of low political value, and that its exchangeability cannot be explained solely by scale. Why, then, conclude that the *amount* of celebrity capital possessed is a key factor influencing this process? This returns us to the interconnection between celebrity capital and representation. With celebrity capital attributed political value through claims to represent others, resources that support claims to represent a large audience - or an audience not represented by other political actors - aid acceptance.

Demonstrating an ability to rapidly accumulate celebrity capital supports acceptance a celebrity has ‘reach’ and is ‘popular’, rendering their interventions politically valuable. Prior to allegations of tax avoidance for example support from ‘Hollywood star’ Martin Freeman was declared a ‘coup’ for Labour, on the assumption people would watch and listen. The high number of views his party election broadcast attracted on YouTube reinforced this, enabling Labour List (2015a) to claim the party was ‘winning the web war’. The best media weapon for supporting representative claims, however, can be seen where a celebrity possesses highly followed social media accounts of their own. These provide valuable platforms for performing representative claims, attracting media attention to them, and intervening in any political information cycles they spark.

Most importantly social media metrics lend strong support to claims to speak to or for an audience, demonstrating someone possesses the resources – particularly when combined with an ability to rapidly accumulate celebrity capital - ‘to reach a wide group’ (Saward, 2010: 148). While politicians use votes, polling data and depictions of crowds to connect their image to ‘representations of the people’ (Marshall, 2014: 219), social

media provide further means for celebrities to claim connection to the mass. While celebrities need to ‘invoke and enthuse’ an audience for their claims, unlike some unelected actors they will not need to build one ‘from scratch’ (Saward, 2010: 94).

Russell Brand and journalists used social media metrics and content as proxies for ‘public support’, as the political information cycle around New Era became argument over whether Brand or *The Sun* could claim to represent ‘the people’. Ed Miliband justified meeting Brand on the grounds his audience afforded opportunity to reach outside the ‘empty stadium’ of the mainstream campaign (BBC News, 2015a). Here the assumption people listened to Brand was grounded in his social media following, contrasted positively with press and politicians to justify his presence in the campaign. Journalists who defended Brand against contestation usually did so without lending him personal support, instead using social media metrics to argue Brand had support from ‘the public’. Emma Watson’s high celebrity capital and large social media following formed a key part of her acceptance, valued for enabling her to ‘give voice’ to feminists.

It is not simply her higher celebrity capital and larger social media following however which meant OSS members comfortably accepted Watson, while *Trews* viewers marching behind Russell Brand negotiated their support for him. I now discuss the three further factors I argue influence the exchangeability of celebrity capital for political capital, beginning with class.

8.3.2 *Class*

In Chapter 3, I discussed how celebrities face a dual class barrier, evaluated against political norms which privilege ‘seriousness’ and hierarchies of genre which stigmatise the ‘popular’ (Bourdieu, 1993; Inthorn and Street, 2001; Marshall, 2014). Those with equally high capital will not find this to be equally exchangeable if they do not also share a ‘trajectory’ of how they accumulated this over time (Bourdieu, 1987). As habitus

influences not only a ‘sense of one’s place’ but also ‘a sense of the place of others’ (Bourdieu, 1987: 5), class is a key factor influencing the exchangeability of celebrity capital for political capital.

This requires further explication, as I argued in Chapter 4 that Russell Brand foregrounded his working-class background as a resource to support ‘mirroring’ claims to represent New Era (Saward, 2010: 99). There are two key limitations however which demonstrate a broader class barrier to political capital. Claims based on ‘descriptive similarity’ are confined to the specific contexts in which they are constructed. In Chapter 5 Brand no longer foregrounded class as he constructed claims in closer proximity to political elites, yet class-based judgements over his behaviour became more central to contestation. During New Era I found that in spite of class-based similarity to constituents, Brand expended great effort in negotiating claims to ‘amplify’ rather than speak for them. While I argued in Chapter 2 that all celebrity claims must be negotiated with care due to economic capital, not *all* celebrity claims need be negotiated with *equal* care. While Emma Watson undoubtedly works hard to represent feminists across fields and platforms, her middle-class background negates the need to negotiate her distance from constituents *or* her high economic capital to the same degree.

The influence of class manifests itself in multiple forms of differentiation and distinction. ‘Reading back’ is not based simply on the *scale* of a celebrity’s economic capital but how they accumulated this. The greater attention paid to working-class celebrities’ wealth demonstrates Bourdieu’s argument that an ability to ‘conceal’ that which elevates you is ‘the very definition of symbolic power’ (1991: 209). Emma Watson’s wealth was rarely noted in media coverage or by citizens, a stark contrast with Russell Brand and Steve Coogan. This supports Mendick et al.’s (2018) argument that while fame is associated with ‘undeserved wealth’ class-based judgements mean some are seen to have ‘earned’ their elevated capital. I argue these distinctions not only judge

‘who can legitimately occupy the position of celebrity’ (Mendick et al., 2018: 142), but influence the value and therefore the exchangeability of celebrity capital itself.

Similar distinctions are drawn through judgements over intention, with all celebrities attempting to justify their motivations as they made representative claims. Coogan for example told ITV viewers while out campaigning for Labour that there was ‘nothing in it for me’ (ITV report, 2015). Contrasting cases, I find a ‘paradox of self-promotion’ in the process of claim-making and exchange. Celebrities *must* demonstrate ability to attract attention for claims to be accepted, yet claims are contested if the celebrity is perceived to be motivated by self-promotion. This supports findings that celebrities must be seen as ‘genuine’ in their commitment to a cause (Inthorn and Street, 2011; Manning et al., 2016), with fame legitimated where the celebrity is seen to use it to ‘benefit others’ (Mendick et al., 2018: 147). Watson benefits not only from this distinction but also her association with formal education. This lends her a ‘right to be ignorant’ which Brand the autodidact is refused (Bourdieu, 1984: 329), as she is afforded greater opportunity to ‘learn’ how to represent others. These findings have clear implications for who can exchange celebrity capital more readily, and therefore speak with recognition, in the political field.

Class-based judgements can be seen in distinctions not only on the basis of wealth but of behaviour. While Coogan’s wealth was a source of reading back, his behaviour and association with comedy were used to contest his right to be taken seriously. In the context of elected positions Ribke concludes (2015: 173), ‘the same factors that explain class inequality in society are valid for explaining why some celebrities may be allowed to aspire to higher positions in the political sphere while others may not’. I argue this is applicable to celebrity interventions more broadly. Class-based judgements over behaviour form greater barriers to political capital in closer proximity to political elites, supporting Giles’ (2015) argument that some field boundaries are more ‘porous’ than

others. This also reinforces the connection between class and genre, supporting Arthurs and Little's (2016) argument that comedy is attributed low status and showing this to conflict in particular with political norms privileging seriousness (Inthorn and Street, 2011). With celebrities facing greater barriers if they do not conform to political norms, 'connection' to formal politics presents a further factor that can support or hinder efforts to exchange celebrity capital.

8.3.3 *Connection*

Saward argues 'non-electoral' claims are often evaluated through one of two 'modes of reception': 'authenticity' and 'authorization' (2010: 104). 'Authenticity' is evaluated through 'independence' based on distance from 'governmental institutions', while 'authority' is grounded in 'connection' to 'more conventionally legitimate structures'. We have seen how celebrities attempt to establish their 'relationship' to the citizens who 'authorize' them to 'pronounce' on politics (Bourdieu, 1991: 111). I find that while constructing distance from politicians can support acceptance and mobilise citizens, connection to formal politics lends strongest support to celebrity claims. While this appears contradictory, Emma Watson's 'connection from a distance' provides the most effective means of associating with political legitimacy *without* being associated with 'the politics of parties and politicians' (Tormey, 2015: 7).

In making claims to represent New Era Brand exploited and exaggerated limits to elective representation (Saward, 2010: 93). This use of the 'familiar, emotional script' of populist rhetoric facilitated acceptance from those seeking opportunities to express discontent with mainstream media and political elites (Grattan, 2010: 198). As with Brand's use of his working-class background however, this is a restrictive resource. Saward's (2010: 59) observation that even 'partisan claims' are often dressed in 'non partisan clothing' could be seen in Chapter 5, where celebrities constructed distance from 'politics' as they endorsed Labour. In this context celebrity and economic capital

undermines claims to be one of ‘us’ rather than one of ‘them’ (Štechová and Hájek, 2015). While I find that all celebrity claims are evaluated through this oppositional paradigm, Emma Watson’s case demonstrates its most effective negotiation.

Watson benefits from ‘connection’ to ‘institutional resources’ through her role as UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, which she foregrounds in claims based on ‘expertise and special credentials’ (Saward, 2010: 98). For members of her feminist book group this reinforced a sense she is more serious than ‘other celebrities’, and has the influence to command audiences with world leaders. While Watson’s connection ‘authorizes’ her claims she is also accepted as ‘authentic ambassador’. This apparent contradiction is explained by two key factors. As I argue in the following section, for celebrities ‘authenticity’ requires more than demonstrating ‘independence’. Furthermore I find ‘independence’ is *not* about demonstrating distance from political elites in general, but from partisan politics specifically. Watson rarely shares personal political opinions, and largely avoids partisan alignment. She is therefore well-placed to negotiate the ‘conflicting requirements’ of citizens, who seek ‘serious’ political representatives but seek assurance that political work is not ‘part of someone’s job’ (Inthorn and Street, 2011: 481; Loader et al., 2016).

Class and connection are interconnected, as middle class celebrities and those associated with more prestigious genres are better placed to negotiate distance from both political elites and those they claim to represent. Both celebrities and politicians, Marshall argues (2014: 227), must ‘provide evidence of familiarity while providing evidence of exceptionality and hierarchical distance’. Watson’s ‘connection’ fosters comfortable acceptance from those uncomfortable associating with celebrity. Distance from partisan politics is not however the only factor supporting her claims to be ‘authentic’ as well as ‘authorized’.

8.3.4 Consistency

The degree to which celebrities present themselves consistently influences exchangeability of celebrity capital for two key reasons. Firstly, as is demonstrated most clearly through Russell Brand's interventions, because the celebrity must be seen to consistently represent the interests of a constituency. Secondly, as can be seen in Emma Watson's case, because consistency is key to being accepted as 'authentic'. Ribke's (2015) argument that celebrities associated with consistent performances in the field of entertainment find it easier to obtain elected office is therefore more broadly applicable.

The importance of consistent self-presentation is demonstrated most clearly in relation to *political* consistency. Russell Brand's support for New Era was consistent with the role of 'anti-austerity spokesperson' Arthurs and Shaw (2016) demonstrate he crafted in his earlier interview with Jeremy Paxman. His endorsement of Labour in 2015 supports Štechová and Hájek's (2015) finding that 'coat-changers' - whose endorsements contradict expectations - receive the most negative response. Indeed media coverage of Brand, Coogan *and* Freeman commented on inconsistencies in their political statements over time. With Brand's political legitimacy tied to acceptance he represented *Trews* viewers, the perception the 'self-appointed leader of the "don't vote" revolution' had 'risked the wrath of social media by changing his mind' disrupted Brand's connection to 'the people' (ITV News at Ten, 2015). Whether or not *Trews* viewers *actually* felt betrayed, without a supportive hashtag to draw on in defence Brand was unable to craft a consistent political narrative and 're-make' claims to represent his audience.

Brand's inability to 'shake off' his 'established reputation' demonstrates two connected barriers to consistency (Arthurs and Little, 2016: 104). The celebrity brings 'meanings' from past performances and media representations to the process of claim-making and exchange (Jackson and Darrow, 2005; McCracken, 1989). While Saward

(2010: 72) refers to ‘unspoken background factors that facilitate the making of accepted claims’, it is not only *supportive* but also *conflicting* meanings that influence how claims are remediated and evaluated. While celebrities can foreground particular meanings, they cannot precipitate a sudden shift in how they are represented by others. We saw this when former child star Watson’s discussion of sex was met with mock outrage, and as Brand failed to attract positive media coverage from tabloids with whom he had a ‘fraught’ relationship (Turner, 2014: 83). Ribke concludes it is easier for celebrities with a ‘non-ambiguously positive generic identity’ to make ‘a successful foray into politics’ (2015: 171). Those who have been more reliant on tabloids to accumulate celebrity capital, therefore, are likely to face greater barriers to exchanging it.

In Chapter 6 I argued consistent self-presentation is key to Watson’s claim to be an ‘authentic ambassador’, as she performs claims to represent feminists not only across platforms but across fields. Her continued association with her first acting role in the *Harry Potter* series not only ‘reinforces her brand as the smart, rule following, and purely good character’ (O’Donnell, 2017: 117), but emphasises Watson’s ‘trajectory’ and ‘middle-class femininity’ (Bourdieu, 1987; Mendick et al., 2018). While Seward (2010) argues the ‘authenticity’ of non-electoral claims is assessed through ‘independence’ from formal politics, I build on this by finding for celebrities ‘authenticity’ is also contingent on consistent self-presentation. Watson’s use of social media to ‘perform engagement’ while rarely sharing personal information suggests performance of a consistent rather than a ‘true’ self is key to perceived authenticity (Marwick, 2013; Thomas, 2014).

8.4 What other Political Benefits Result from this Process?

When celebrities intervene in the political field, they do so through claims to represent others. While we have seen that citizens attempt to assess celebrities’ motivations for doing so, I agree with Brockington (2011: 11) that the question of whether they ‘really care’ is not relevant here. With celebrity claims to political capital *always* implicating

citizens, constructing a constituency and attributing characteristics to them, we need to investigate the consequences for citizens regardless.

Responding to Street's (2012: 374) argument that literature on celebrity politics offers more 'in the way of theory and speculation than hard evidence', this thesis has examined not only how celebrities intervene in contrasting political contexts but also what implications this has. I argue celebrity claims can result in political benefits for citizens as well as political capital for the celebrity. Such benefits cannot be guaranteed in spite of how much celebrity capital is brought to the process, and positive and negative outcomes often coexist. We therefore cannot ascribe a uniform 'democratic value' to celebrity politics, and must investigate empirically what happens next when celebrities claim to speak on behalf of others.

I have used the broad term 'political benefits' anticipating that the outcomes of celebrity claims will vary by context. Comparing my case studies however, I find there are essentially two forms that can – but are not guaranteed to – result from this process. The easiest to anticipate are political benefits for citizens that correspond with the celebrity's stated aims. For example I found that Emma Watson's feminist book group is a space where members can learn from like-minded others, following Watson's own emphasis on discussion and learning. Russell Brand's representative role was crucial in helping New Era achieve a victory that had felt 'impossible' (Garrett, 2014), and afforded broader opportunities for citizens to express political discontent. That Brand also played on distrust in elected representatives – ignoring their role in securing the sale of the estate – shows that to understand the consequences of celebrity politics we must look beyond the headlines.

As I discussed in section 8.1, these cases raise questions over the broader implications of celebrities positioning themselves among or against elected

representatives. Where celebrities lack connection to a non-partisan political organisation, they construct claims grounded not only in ‘independence’ from formal politics but which use populist rhetoric and assumed discontent with politicians as a resource. While celebrities like other unelected claim-makers can benefit from the limits of elective representation (Saward, 2010), where they exaggerate these limits celebrities could exacerbate citizens’ discontent with their formal political representatives (Stoker, 2006; Hay, 2007: 90).

There is also a second form of potential political benefit which has not been considered in previous research. This arises from citizens feeling that their political interests or values are represented by someone with high celebrity capital. This demonstrates the need for empirical work to investigate not only whether celebrities are accepted as legitimate political representatives, but also what this means for those who afford this acceptance. In response to Street’s (2004) suggestion celebrities *could* represent the political views of others I argue this is not only possible, but that where citizens *do* ‘see themselves’ in celebrity representative claims this has meaningful consequences at the individual level (Saward, 2010: 149).

This can be seen most notably in Chapter 6, where I argued the political benefits of engagement with Watson’s feminist book group and the sense of being represented are not limited to her fans. Her representative claims were particularly meaningful however to those who had followed Watson’s political ‘journey’ from Hogwarts to the UN and beyond. As I discussed in section 8.1, while these political benefits are significant, there is cause to be cautious in considering their scale. Even where a celebrity possesses great media resources and all the factors that lend best support to obtaining political capital, not all fans will follow into the political field.

In this thesis I have contributed a model for explaining the exchangeability of celebrity capital for political capital. In this concluding chapter I have shown how each of my case studies provide demonstrations of this process at work, or failing to work, in contrasting political contexts. Comparing the celebrities studied here I have argued that four key factors influence the ability to ‘convert fame into political power’ (Driessens, 2013: 549), and that this process can result not only in political capital for celebrities but in meaningful political benefits for citizens. These theoretical developments and empirical findings form the core contributions of my thesis. By taking a case study approach to generating these findings however, my work has drawn on academic literature on a broad range of questions. In the following section I therefore set out the contributions my case studies make to important debates, beyond my core questions concerning celebrity, representation and power.

8.5 Case Study Contributions

8.5.1 Chapter 4

The key contribution of Chapter 4 is demonstrating that celebrity capital and representative claims are interconnected, with a celebrity’s political credibility dependent on acceptance as representing others. However this case study of Russell Brand’s involvement in the campaign to save the New Era estate also contributes to the literature on celebrity and single-issue campaigning discussed in section 2.5. Panis and Van den Bulck (2012; 2014) outlined key tensions in celebrity campaigning; one-off interventions attract most attention, but to overcome ‘scepticism’ celebrities must demonstrate long-term commitment to causes. Brand’s efforts to ‘amplify’ New Era show celebrities can use social media to demonstrate connection to short-term campaigns, but this requires consistent effort. Scepticism can also be ameliorated if the campaign is consistent with a celebrity’s past political statements and self-presentation.

This case also contributes to questions over how celebrities can best use their media resources to support campaigners. It challenges Thrall et al.'s (2008) argument that only large, well-resourced organisations can use celebrity to attract attention from news and entertainment media. It is true, however, that Brand largely attracted attention through the kind of contestation an established organisation would presumably seek to avoid. This case also raises questions however over Thrall et al.'s (2008) conclusion that campaigns would benefit more from instead using celebrities to 'narrowcast', targeting small groups of interested citizens. It was Brand's ability to *both* 'narrowcast' to social media followers and 'broadcast' by attracting mainstream media attention that made his support valuable.

Chapter 4 also provides further evidence of the uneasy relationship between celebrity campaigners and the politicians they seek to influence, demonstrating that political benefits often co-exist with negative outcomes (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008; Naik, 2008). As Jamie Oliver lamented, dubiously, it had 'taken a documentary' to make politicians 'do something' about school food (Naik, 2008), by positioning himself as amplifier of the ignored Brand obscured the necessary role of politicians in securing New Era's success. Comparing these cases raises questions over celebrities' capacity to contribute to long-term change without a government already committed to this. While Boris Johnson broke from business as usual to support New Era, action at the national level was unlikely from a Prime Minister pursuing austerity politics who just months later dismissed Brand as 'a joke' (The Guardian, 2015).

Ultimately however this case provides further evidence over how celebrities can use their resources to assist campaigners, significant when organisations and politicians continue to believe in the power of celebrities (Brockington, 2014; Panis and Van den Bulck, 2014). While this was hardly straightforward, Brand's involvement in the New Era campaign demonstrates celebrity claims to speak for others *can* put the voices of these 'others' where they need to be heard.

8.5.2 Chapter 5

Chapter 5's key contribution is demonstrating how celebrity capital, inherently considered of little political value, is attributed value through claims to represent others. Contributing further evidence on how celebrities are evaluated, it raises broader questions over who can claim the right to speak in the political field. This case study of celebrity endorsements of the Labour Party in 2015 also contributes to literature discussed in section 2.4, on celebrity influence on citizen opinion. I find further evidence celebrities do not lead citizens to evaluate parties more positively, and that the 'meanings' and previous political interventions associated with a celebrity influence how endorsements are evaluated (Jackson and Darrow, 2005; Štechová and Hájek, 2015).

Most importantly this demonstrates endorsements cannot be understood separately from the political information cycles they spark, or the broader campaigns celebrities intervene in. This case supports Nisbett and DeWalt's (2016) argument that celebrity political statements are often not received 'as stated' on social media. I found not only that tweets about endorsements were more likely to share links to news articles than to the original content, but that evaluations followed political information cycles dominated by negative interventions by Conservative-supporting journalists. Russell Brand's endorsement was also evaluated through broader campaign narratives over who politicians were or were not speaking to. This has methodological implications, suggesting experimental and survey research provides limited understanding as it does not reflect how citizens experience celebrity interventions.

This case also contributes evidence over the limited and precarious benefits celebrity endorsements can afford. Support from someone with high celebrity capital can enthuse and encourage existing party supporters, with their potential to mobilise local activists an area for further investigation. The media coverage an endorsement receives is important more broadly as I find this plays a key role in the 'third person effects'

evidenced by others (Brubaker, 2011; Pease and Brewer, 2008). With endorsements evaluated according to potential strategic benefits - based on the idea ‘others’ listen to celebrities (Brockington, 2014) - though easily undermined by negative coverage endorsements *must* attract media attention to be of benefit to politicians.

8.5.3 Chapters 6 and 7

The key contribution of this study of Emma Watson’s online feminist book group is that it demonstrates the factors providing strongest support to celebrity representative claims. With celebrities connected to institutions more able to exchange celebrity capital for political capital, this case shows celebrities can afford greater political benefits where they go beyond ‘traditional’ activism to provide more ‘everyday’ opportunities for citizen engagement.

Assessing Watson’s efforts to do this, this case study contributes to academic discussion on digital platforms and feminist activism. I find Watson’s online feminist book group and discussion forum is valued by those lacking spaces to discuss feminism with like-minded others. This includes those who avoid discussions around feminism on social media due to harassment and hate speech. I therefore argue that while social media afford valuable platforms for engagement with and organisation of feminist campaigns (Bates, 2013; Cochrane, 2013; Keller et al., 2016), spaces dedicated to feminist discussion and learning provide a valuable addition or alternative. While discussion forums with dedicated space to talk politics have been found to foster less productive political discussion (Graham et al., 2016b; Wright, 2012), in the context of feminist politics I argue a degree of similarity fosters an environment in which difference can be more comfortably discussed.

Chapter 7 also has implications for how we study community and discussion - and its political implications - on online platforms such as message forums. I find the political

benefits of engagement with Our Shared Shelf were not confined to those participating in publically visible discussions. To understand how people actually engage with these platforms and what political benefits result, we therefore need to use methods that go ‘behind the screens’. This case study builds on previous work by using interviews to address these questions, finding support for Hine’s (2000: 24) argument that we should avoid relying on evidence from the most ‘visible’ members.

8.6 Limitations and Avenues for Further Research

The case studies presented in this thesis demonstrate interesting commonalities and contradictions in how celebrities construct claims to represent citizens, and how these are evaluated. This has enabled me to address my overarching questions of how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital, what key factors influence this process, and what other political benefits result. By studying celebrity interventions which occurred during the course of my research, I was able to collect data as these cases unfolded. This was key to observing and theorising a process I argue cannot be separated from political information cycles that unfold ‘in real time’ (Chadwick, 2017: 6). This thesis is the result of inductive work, whereby the model I propose for explaining how celebrity capital can be exchanged for political capital emerged from empirical case studies. My argument that celebrity capital has greater explanatory power in political contexts when combined with representative claims emerged as my cases, different in many ways, demonstrated the centrality of representation to questions surrounding celebrity and political legitimacy.

I therefore argue my approach was well suited to the phenomenon I sought to explore, contributing to Street’s (2012) call for further empirical and comparative research while also developing our theoretical understanding. There are however two key limitations concerning the comparability and generalisability of findings. I have contrasted my case studies to draw conclusions over the key factors that influence the exchangeability of celebrity capital. While cases address common themes and

corresponding case-specific questions (as I discussed in section 1.2), the different approaches taken to methods and data collection limit the precision of cross-case comparison. I have used the methods and data I felt were most appropriate in each case. While participant observation and thick description of political information cycles worked well for studying Russell Brand and New Era this approach could not simply have been applied to subsequent cases, which presented their own opportunities and challenges. While I therefore argue a uniform approach would neither be possible or desirable, this thesis cannot provide precision over the varying influence of factors across cases to the degree a method such as qualitative comparative analysis could (Halperin and Heath, 2012; Rihoux, 2006).

My case study approach also limits the scope of this research, and the extent to which we can generalise from either my overarching or case-specific findings. I have covered cases where celebrities intervened in different political contexts: from grassroots activism, to national elections, to citizens' everyday engagement. Clearly however three case studies can generate valuable findings to inform theories but cannot assess their broader applicability. While I argue celebrity interventions in the political field can best be assessed as representative claims, my focus on examples grounded in UK politics means a need remains to consider the relationship between celebrity and representation in other contexts. I would expect a theoretical approach combining celebrity capital and representative claims to be readily applicable to other cases and contexts. There is further research to be done however on how the key factors which influence this process vary across them, research that would begin to address the limitations of this work.

This thesis raises a number of other questions that could advance our understanding of celebrity, politics and power. The renewed focus on celebrities and political representation I have advocated could consider many interesting claims to represent citizens' interests. For example in contrast with other work on political satire – which

focuses on whether ‘infotainment’ affords political learning – Baym’s case study of a debate between John Stewart and Bill O’Reilly argues both acted as ‘representatives of distinct politico-cultural identities’ (2014: 78). Having found that such claims not only implicate citizens but have implications for them, there is scope for further consideration of celebrity claims and their consequences.

Further research into the relationship between celebrity and politics should, as Street (2004) suggests, place greater emphasis on audiences. My research on how citizens engage with Emma Watson’s feminist book group provides a starting point for examining how celebrities afford opportunity for ‘everyday’ engagement with political issues (Highfield, 2016). Digital ethnography and other methods that seek out citizen perspectives enable us to move beyond questions of what celebrities *do*, and continue to ask what their ‘representation does’ for those they claim to speak for (Saward, 2010: 104).

Finally this thesis can inspire broader research into how the right to speak and be heard in the political field is claimed, contested, and competed for. My findings suggest that while the ability of celebrities to obtain political capital may be contentious, it is ultimately not disruptive or democratising. While celebrities can claim to speak for those who lack their elevated capital, and successfully bring their issues and interests to broader attention, the pursuit of political capital is no less constrained by hierarchy for celebrities than for others. Celebrity interventions in the political field are therefore likely to reproduce inequalities even where they aim to challenge them. The approach I have taken to assessing how representative claims are contested and evaluated can inform broader examination of the competition for political capital, and how the right to speak in the political field is claimed and conferred. While the study of celebrity and politics may therefore appear trivial to some, the questions raised here get to the heart of political power and our public sphere.

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Appendix A: Supporting Information for Chapter 4

I began using Google Alerts to collect all online news and entertainment coverage mentioning Russell Brand or the New Era Estate from October 2014 (prior to the campaign's two protests on November 8th and December 1st 2014). In Chapter 4 I reconstruct the political information cycle around the Westbrook protest from the day the march was held, December 1st 2014, until December 23rd 2014, four days after the sale of the estate to a charitable foundation was announced.

All online news coverage collected during this period is presented below, by date of publication. This does not include coverage in print newspapers, as front page coverage of Brand during this period is referenced directly in text in section 4.3. A search for print newspaper coverage mentioning Russell Brand during the same period using *Lexis Nexis* returned 294 results. I went through this coverage to ensure it did not include content which had not been replicated in online coverage. This high figure is partly explained by Russell Brand's appearance on the BBC panel show *Question Time* alongside then UKIP leader Nigel Farage. I collected around 125 online news articles on this story between December 12 and December 14 2014. These were not included in my analysis and so are not listed below. Finally I do not list the social media and YouTube content collected during this period as this is referenced directly in Chapter 4.

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Appendix B: Supporting Information for Chapter 5

B.1 Coding Framework and Manual for Content Analysis

The full coding framework used for content analysis of tweets can be seen below, followed by the accompanying manual I produced to guide coding. Tweets were coded in a separate Excel document for each of the celebrities studied, and each tweet was coded as a distinct unit of analysis.

General Responses

G1 Tone of tweet toward endorsement	0 = Negative 1 = Neutral 2 = Positive
G2 Tweeter feels more positive about party	0 = Absent 1 = Present
G3 Tweeter feels less positive about party	0 = Absent 1 = Present
G4 Tweeter feels more positive about celebrity	0 = Absent 1 = Present
G5 Tweeter feels less positive about celebrity	0 = Absent 1 = Present
G6 Rejection of <u>all</u> celebrity involvement in politics	0 = Absent 1 = Present
G7 Negative response <u>not</u> based on celebrity	0 = Absent 1 = Present
G8 Strategy response	0 = Absent 1 = Negative 2 = Positive
G9 References content of endorsement	0 = Absent 1 = Present

Markers of (in)authenticity

M10 Consistency - previous political statements/actions	0 = Absent 1 = Present
M11 Inconsistency - previous political statements/actions	0 = Absent 1 = Present
M12 Inconsistency – wealth	0 = Absent 1 = Present
M13 Accusation of tax avoidance	0 = Absent 1 = Present
M14 Inconsistency – moral judgement	0 = Absent 1 = Present
M15 Consistency – career and endorsement	0 = Absent 1 = Present
M16 Inconsistency – career and endorsement	0 = Absent 1 = Present
M17 Accusation of self-interest	0 = Absent 1 = Present
M18 Other marker of consistency	0 = Absent 1 = Present (state)
M19 Other marker of inconsistency	0 = Absent 1 = Present (state)

M20 Response is misogynistic or critical of endorser's appearance	0 = Absent 1 = Present
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Perceptions of (in)authenticity

P21 Contesting performance of authenticity	0 = Absent 1 = Present
P22 Accepting/supporting performance of authenticity	0 = Absent 1 = Present
P23 Contesting accusation of inauthenticity	0 = Absent 1 = Present
P24 Accepting/supporting accusation of inauthenticity	0 = Absent 1 = Present

Source

S1 Contains link to news article or blog	0 = Absent 1 = Present
S2 Contains link to endorsement	0 = Absent 1 = Present
S3 PEB seen on television	0 = Absent 1 = Present
S4 Other	0 = Absent 1 = Present

Coding Manual

Each tweet should be coded as an individual unit of analysis, where 0 = absent and 1 = present. There are two exceptions to this. Tone (G1) should be coded as 0 = negative, 1 = neutral and 2 = positive. Strategy (G8) should be coded as 0 = absent, 1 = negative, and 2 = positive.

For variables M18 (other marker of consistency) and M19 (other marker of inconsistency), where a tweet is coded as 1 (present) you should write in the cell what the other marker of (in)consistency suggested in the tweet is. For example: '1 – privately educated'. For tweets which include links to external content – for example a news article - this content should be considered as part of the unit of analysis.

General Responses

G1 Tone of tweet toward endorsement.

Code as 0 if the overarching tone of the tweet toward the endorsement is negative.

Code as 1 if the overarching tone of the tweet toward the endorsement is neutral. This includes tweets which simply share the endorsement unless clear agreement or approval is stated.

Code as 2 if the overarching tone of the tweet toward the endorsement is positive.

G2 Tweeter feels more positive about party.

Code as 1 if tweeter expresses positive feelings about the Labour party and/or Ed Miliband *as a result of the endorsement*.

G3 Tweeter feels more negative about party.

Code as 1 one if tweeter expresses negative feelings about the Labour party and/or Ed Miliband *as a result of the endorsement*.

G4 Tweeter feels more positive about celebrity.

Code as 1 if tweeter expresses positive feelings about the celebrity *as a result of their endorsement*.

G5 Tweeter feels more negative about celebrity.

Code as 1 if tweeter expresses negative feelings about the celebrity *as a result of their endorsement*.

G6 Rejection of all celebrity endorsements/involvement in politics

Code as 1 if the tone of the tweet toward the endorsement is negative (G1 = 0) but this negative response is not based on the endorser, but on a rejection of all celebrity political endorsements and/or an objection to celebrities intervening in politics.

G7 Negative response not based on celebrity

Code as 1 if the tone of the tweet toward the endorsement is negative (G1 = 0) but this negative response is based on a negative opinion of the party and/or the content of the endorsement and claims or policy pledges made.

G8 Strategy response

Code as 1 if the tweet speculates the endorsement may or will have a negative impact on the Labour party's campaign, or chances of electoral success.

Code as 2 if the tweet speculates the endorsement may or will have a positive impact on the Labour party's campaign, or chances of electoral success.

Otherwise, code as 0.

G9 References content of endorsement

Code as 1 if the tweet refers to the content of the endorsement, by noting a key issue or issues discussed, quoting the endorser, or making a judgement over the content (e.g. that it is untruthful). This does not include references to visual content, such as the setting of the endorsement or the appearance of the endorser.

Markers of (in)authenticity

M10 Consistency - previous political statements/actions

Code as 1 if tweeter perceives consistency between the endorsement, and any previous political statements or actions by the celebrity.

M11 Inconsistency - previous political statements/actions

Code as 1 if tweeter perceives inconsistency between the endorsement, and any previous political statements or actions by the celebrity.

M12 Inconsistency – wealth

Code as 1 if tweeter perceives inconsistency between the endorsement, and the wealth or economic privilege of the celebrity endorser.

M13 Accusation of tax avoidance

Code as 1 if the tweeter states or speculates that the celebrity has avoided paying tax.

M14 Inconsistency – moral

Code as 1 if the tweeter makes a negative moral judgement about the endorser's personal life, including references to past or present scandals.

M15 Consistency – career and endorsement

Code as 1 if the tweeter perceives consistency between the celebrities' current or past careers and their endorsement.

M16 Inconsistency – career and endorsement

Code as 1 if the tweeter perceives inconsistency between the celebrities' current or past careers and their endorsements. This may be an objection to an endorsement from an actor or comedian. This includes references to endorsers who are actors as 'luvvies'.

M17 Accusation of self-interest

Code as 1 if the tweeter suggests or states that the celebrity's endorsement is motivated by self-interest. This may be financial self-interest, suggestion a celebrity is motivated by publicity, or self-interested pursuit of certain policies.

M18 Other marker of consistency

Code as 1 if the tweeter suggests another indicator of consistency between the endorser and the endorsement. Write in the cell what this is.

M19 Other marker of inconsistency

Code as 1 if the tweeter suggests another indicator of inconsistency between the endorser and the endorsement. Write in the cell what this is.

M20 Response is misogynistic and/or critical of endorser's appearance

Code as 1 if the tweeter makes a misogynistic comment about the endorser, and/or criticises them based on their appearance.

Perceptions of (in)authenticity

P21 Contesting performance of authenticity

Code as 1 if tweeter contests the endorser's performance of or claim to *authenticity in their endorsement*. Includes accusations of hypocrisy.

P22 Accepting/supporting performance of authenticity

Code as 1 if the tweeter accepts or supports the endorser's performance or claim to authenticity *in their endorsement*.

P23 Contesting accusation of inauthenticity

Code as 1 if the tweeter contests an accusation that the endorser is inconsistent or inauthentic made by a journalist, blogger, and/or another Twitter user.

P24 Accepting/supporting accusation of inauthenticity

Code as 1 if the tweeter refers to an accusation of inconsistency or inauthenticity made by a journalist, blogger, and/or another Twitter user, or expresses support for their accusation.

Source

S1 Contains link to news article or blog

Code as 1 if tweet contains a link to any news article or blog post

S2 Contains link to endorsement

Code as 1 if tweet contains a link to the YouTube video of the endorsement OR to a Labour site or social media, including partisan blogs such as Labour List. For tweets about Russell Brand this includes any YouTube video of interview content.

S3 PEB seen on television

Code as 1 if the tweet is a response to seeing the PEB on television (does not apply to Russell Brand data set).

S4 Other

Code as 1 if the tweet is a response to seeing the PEB or discussion of the PEB on another source, such as television news or political discussion programmes. For the Martin Freeman data set, this includes references to Channel 4's *Gogglebox*.

B.2 Intercoder Reliability Testing

I conducted an intercoder reliability (ICR) test for each of the variables presented in the coding framework. A second coder was given training on how to code tweets, including being shown the relevant endorsement content and the political information cycles described in Chapter 5. They used the coding manual presented above to code 150 tweets in an Excel sheet. I used Recal2 to calculate ICR by comparing the first and second coder results for these 150 tweets. ReCal is a set of online tools for testing ICR designed by Deen Freelon (2017). Recal2 produces reliability coefficients for nominal data produced

by two coders for multiple variables. As this can only process numerical data words included in results were removed prior to calculating ICR (this applies to variables M18 and M19, where coders were asked to state ‘other’ markers of consistency or inconsistency in tweets).

Table B.1 below ICR results in both percentage agreement and Krippendorff’s alpha for each variable. All variables received a reliability score above the acceptable level for drawing ‘tentative conclusions’ (.667), and the majority received a result above .800 (Krippendorff, 2013: 324-5).

Table B.1. Intercoder Reliability Results by Variable

Variable	a	%	Variable	a	%
G1	0.918	94.7	M15	0.797	96.7
G2	0.744	98	M16	0.854	99.3
G3	0.747	94	M17	1	100
G4	0.916	98.7	M18	1	100
G5	0.762	95.3	M19	1	100
G6	1	100	M20	1	100
G7	0.874	97.3	P21	0.797	99.3
G8	0.789	97.3	P22	0.701	97.3
G9	0.863	93.3	P23	0.794	98.7
M10	1	100	P24	1	100
M11	1	100	S1	0.844	93.3
M12	1	100	S2	0.790	91.3
M13	1	100	S3	0.774	94
M14	1	100	S4	1	100

Note: N = 150. a = Krippendorff’s Alpha, % = percentage agreement.

B.3 Full Results Tables for Content Analysis

Table B.2. Tone of tweets toward endorsements (variable G1, percentages)

	Martin Freeman	Jo Brand	Steve Coogan	Russell Brand
Negative	39.9	45.5	29.8	26.4
Neutral	32.9	27.5	36.8	60.3
Positive	27.2	27.0	33.5	13.3

Note: For all results tables percentages are rounded to 1 decimal place. The number of tweets analysed for each endorsement is as follows: Martin Freeman, 3,762; Jo Brand, 415; Steve Coogan, 2,288; Russell Brand, 4,296.

Table B.3. Tweets speculating the strategic impact of endorsements (variable G8, percentages)

	Martin Freeman	Jo Brand	Steve Coogan	Russell Brand
Absent	94.2	94.7	93.5	84.0
Negative	1.2	3.6	2.2	3.3
Positive	4.5	1.7	4.2	12.6

Table B.4. General responses to endorsements (variables G2-G9, percentage coded as 1-Present)

	Martin Freeman	Jo Brand	Steve Coogan	Russell Brand
G2 – More positive about party	4.0	6.3	3.1	4.7
G3 – Less positive about party	3.6	19.5	4.3	8.7
G4 – More positive about celebrity	6.0	14.5	4.6	1.0
G5 – Less positive about celebrity	8.0	19.3	5.1	3.6
G6 – Rejection of all celebrity endorsements/involvement in politics	2.5	2.7	3.0	0.2
G7 – Negative response not based on celebrity	8.7	12.5	7.9	2.4
G9 – References content of endorsement	10.7	33.5	6.8	16.0

Table B.5. Markers of (in)authenticity in responses to endorsements (variables M10-M20, percentage coded as 1 - Present)

	Martin Freeman	Jo Brand	Steve Coogan	Russell Brand
M10 – Consistency – previous political statements/actions	0.2	0.7	0.4	0.0
M11 – Inconsistency – previous political statements/actions	1.0	0.0	0.0	10.7
M12 – Inconsistency - wealth	8.1	2.2	4.8	6.8
M13 – Accusation of tax avoidance	7.5	0.0	0.2	0.1
M14 – Inconsistency – moral judgement	0.1	1.0	3.9	4.8

M15 – Consistency – career and endorsement	0.2	5.8	0.0	0.0
M16 – Inconsistency – career and endorsement	2.3	3.4	5.5	0.5
M17 – Accusation of self-interest	0.7	1.9	2.7	0.6
M18 – Other marker of consistency	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
M19 ²⁵ – Other marker of inconsistency	7.0	1.2	1.4	4.4
M20 – Response is misogynistic or critical of appearance	0.0	6.3	0.0	0.0

Table B.6. Perceptions of (in)authenticity in responses to endorsements (variables P21-P24, percentage coded as 1 - Present)

	Martin Freeman	Jo Brand	Steve Coogan	Russell Brand
P21 – Contesting performance of authenticity	5.7	4.3	5.1	7.7
P22 – Accepting/supporting performance of authenticity	3.7	4.3	4.9	0.9
P23 – Contesting accusation of inauthenticity	4.2	3.4	2.6	14.0
P24 – Accepting/supporting accusation of inauthenticity	11.9	1.2	2.9	7.9

Table B.7. Sources referenced in responses to endorsements (variables S1-S4, percentage coded as 1 - Present)

	Martin Freeman	Jo Brand	Steve Coogan	Russell Brand
S1 Link to news article or blog	26.5	20.0	28.0	67.5

S2 Link to endorsement	17.8	18.3	26.4	7.2
S3 PEB seen on television	9.5	37.3	8.5	N/A
S4 Endorsement seen through other source	8.2	0.0	1.1	3.3

Table B.8. Other markers of inconsistency (M19) noted in responses to Martin Freeman

Number of tweets	Marker of Inconsistency
116	Freeman's son privately educated
58	Inconsistency between Freeman's 'values' stated in PEB and his partners '#FuckTheTories' tweet.
31	Lack of clear link between endorser and party
27	Racism, islamophobia and/or comments against multiculturalism
18	English actor in Scottish PEB
16	Past statement by Freeman that he would use private healthcare
10	Freeman's page on 'Your Fave is Problematic' website, including quotes by Freeman which are racist, sexist and homophobic, and a joke about rape.
7	Misogyny (including joke about rape)
3	Freeman's failure to support local actors in dispute with producers of the Hobbit movies
1	Having live in the USA
1	Nepotism (accusation that Freeman's partner was cast in highly paid BBC roles because of him)
1	English actor in Welsh PEB

Total number of tweets: 3,762

Table B.9. Other markers of inconsistency (M19) noted in responses to Jo Brand

Number of tweets	Marker of inconsistency
2	Misandry
2	Lack of clear link between endorser and party
1	Speculation that Brand uses private healthcare

Total number of tweets: 415

Table B.10. Other markers of inconsistency (M19) noted in responses to Steve Coogan

Number of tweets	Marker of inconsistency
11	Inconsistency with father's politics
5	Speculation that Coogan uses private healthcare
4	Accusation that Mancunian accent is affected
3	Speculation that Coogan does not live in the UK
2	Living in Brighton rather than Manchester where he grew up
2	Working for Murdoch-owned organisations
2	Lack of clear link between endorser and party
1	Inconsistency - class
1	Supported the sale of BBC3

Total number of tweets: 2,288

Table B.11. Other markers of inconsistency (M19) noted in responses to Russell Brand

Number of tweets	Marker of inconsistency
111 (of which 3 do <i>not</i> reference <i>MailOnline</i> article)	Misogyny
66	Endorsement agreed pre-interview
2	Brand's age inconsistent with claims that he represents young people
2	Inconsistency between Brand's environmentalism and past use of private jets and 4x4 cars
2	Brand's accent/language
1	Inconsistency, class
1	Accusation of anti-Semitism
1	Possibly owning candles made by company owned by a Conservative party donor

Total number of tweets: = 4,296

B.4 Media Coverage of Labour's Celebrity Endorsers

I used Google Alerts to collect all mentions of Labour's celebrity endorsers in online news and entertainment sources from the date they intervened in the campaign (with the exception of Russell Brand who I was already collecting content about). Following the election I used Box of Broadcasts to search for television news coverage of endorsements on the following national television and radio news programmes: *BBC News at Ten*, *Newsnight* (BBC 2), *Today* (BBC Radio 4), *ITV News at Ten*, and *Channel 4 News*.

In the sections below I list this content for each celebrity in turn, ordering articles by publication date. Front page print newspaper coverage is not included as it is referenced directly in text and in the bibliography. Similarly I do not list social media content produced by Brand or YouTube videos of party election broadcasts here. Section B.4.4 does not include news coverage collected of Russell Brand's endorsement of Green Party candidate Caroline Lucas, as this was excluded from analysis.

B.4.1 Martin Freeman

First published March 30 2015:

Bennett, O., 2015. Watch Hobbit star Martin Freeman urging voters to 'choose Labour' in new party political broadcast. *Daily Mirror*, (online) 30 March. Available at: http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/watch-hobbit-star-martin-freeman-5428750#ICID=sharebar_twitter (Accessed: 30 August 2018).

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Appendix C: Supporting Information for Chapters 6 and 7

C.1 Interviewing Our Shared Shelf Members

C.1.1 Recruitment Message

‘Consideration’, Kozinets argues (2015: 104), ‘is everything’ as the researcher makes their ‘entrée’ into an online community. Guided by literature on digital ethnography (Boellstorff et. al., 2012; Hine, 2000; 2015; Kozinets, 2015), I took great care in recruiting Our Shared Shelf (OSS) members for interviews in a way which ensured not just participants’ consent but – as far as possible – the consent of the broader community. Before attempting to recruit members I therefore sought permission to do so from the group’s moderators. I contacted one of the group’s most active moderators through private messaging on the Goodreads site, who asked for further information on the aims of my research before circulating my request to other moderators.

My experience undertaking this research demonstrates that getting to know the community you wish to study and contacting group leaders to inform them of your intentions is not simply a ‘courtesy’, but a necessity (Kozinets, 2015: 152). The OSS moderator I contacted asked for further information on the scope of my research and where I wished to publish it, telling me they had previously declined requests to interview members for an article. Coming prepared not only with aims for the research but also with ‘insider’ knowledge of the group was essential to gaining the support of those who dedicate a great deal of time to managing a large online community.

Knowledge of the group and its members was also something I attempted to demonstrate in the message I posted publically on the OSS message forum asking for members to participate in interviews. I posted a ‘recruitment message’ on the forum to minimise the ‘intrusiveness’ of my approach (Kozinets, 2015: 106), and in hope of reaching members who read but did not post in the forum themselves. In this message I attempted to provide sufficient information about myself and my research to establish

‘good relations’ and be ‘upfront’ (Boellstorff, 2012: 95; Kozinets, 2015: 76), while also demonstrating my knowledge of the group and making an effort to ‘fit in’ with its culture and practices (Hine, 2015: 95). Noting Boellstorff et al.’s advice that rapport can be built with ‘informants we have not yet met’ through ‘referral from a well-respected community member’ (2012: 95), I noted that I had obtained permission from moderators to undertake the research. By clicking a link at the start of the second paragraph readers could see my profile on the Royal Holloway website to verify my connection to the University.

Research: Tell me your OSS story?

Dear fellow OSSers,

I hope you don’t mind me starting this thread to ask whether some of you would be happy to help me with some research I am conducting (I asked our lovely mods first, thank you!)

I’m a researcher and teaching assistant at the University of London (Royal Holloway College). My current work focuses on celebrity activists and citizen engagement with social/political issues. My work so far has, as I’m sure won’t surprise any of you, shown that female celebrities who speak out on political problems are judged much more harshly than men. This (and the election of Donald Trump...) has made me really keen to write something about Emma Watson’s feminist activism.

While I’m also really interested in Emma’s work with the UN, academic work on ‘celebrity politics’ tends to focus on the celebrities and politicians but not pay any attention to people, like us, who get involved in campaigns and other spaces started by celebrity activists. I think this overlooks the huge potential places like this have for people to share their thoughts, learn from each other, and become more politically aware and active. For a feminist book club to have so many members is just so exciting :-)

So I’d be really grateful if some of you would be happy to answer a few questions over PM or email about how and why you participate in Our Shared Shelf, and what this means to you. You can write as much or as little as you want, and I might ask to chat more about your experiences but that will be totally up to you. I will not use anybody’s name (or Goodreads username), you will have the right to withdraw what you’ve said, and everyone who contributes will be given a book token or Amazon voucher, whatever works where you are :-). I will of course share my work with everyone who participates and any other OSS members who are interested. This message is already getting way too long so I can go into more detail over PM with anyone who wants to know more about me, the research, or how I will follow ethical guidelines

If you would like to speak to me or just want to know more, please message me on Goodreads. If you prefer you can also email me at ellen.watts.2012@live.rhul.ac.uk. I’d love to speak to anyone who is over the age of 18; it doesn’t matter if you post here all

the time or prefer just to read, if you're new or you've been here since January.

Thanks so much for reading, hope you're having a good weekend.

Ellen

C.1.2 List of Interviews

21 OSS members responded to the recruitment message shown above, with 19 of these completing interviews. In addition to this I approached four members for interview, of which three accepted. Information about the 22 members who participated in this research and the format each of their interviews took can be seen in Table C.1 below. As I noted in section 6.2 all participants responded in writing to the questionnaire shown in the following section, with the exception of one who opted to discuss these over Skype instead. Three participants took part in further discussions following their initial questionnaire, with the format of these contributions also noted in Table C.1.

Table C.1. Participant Information and Interview Formats

Name	Age	Location (and other nationality or heritage where given)	Date of Interview	Format of Interview(s)
Alex	19	Austria	November 2016 December 2016	Written questionnaire. Skype interview (67 minutes).
Alyssa	33	USA	December 2016	Skype Interview (38 minutes)
Amber	25	UK	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Anna	32	UK (Polish)	January 2017	Written questionnaire.
Bianca	44	Spain	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Chloe	34	UK	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Christopher	53	USA	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Clara	28	Germany (French)	November 2016 February 2017	Written questionnaire. Further written questions.
Claudia	22	Germany	February 2017	Written questionnaire.

Hannah	25	Hungary	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Isabella	23	USA	December 2016	Written questionnaire.
Louise	25	Austria	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Maria	69	Mexico (USA)	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Matthew	53	UK	December 2016 January 2017	Written questionnaire. Further written questions.
Michelle	27	USA	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Olivia	30s	UK	January 2017	Written questionnaire.
Paul	43	USA	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Rosa	41	Italy	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Sophia	28	USA (Latina)	December 2016	Written questionnaire.
Stephanie	60+	UK	November 2016	Written questionnaire.
Tricia	43	Canada	December 2016	Written questionnaire.
Yasmin	20	UK (British Nigerian)	December 2016	Written questionnaire.

Note: All names listed here are pseudonyms.

As I discussed in section 6.2 my participants were diverse in terms of their engagement with OSS. Hine (2015: 79) notes that posting a ‘general appeal’ for participants in groups can produce a pool of respondents who are not representative of ‘typical’ members, attracting those who post most actively but not those who read messages but rarely or never publish on the public forum. Having placed an emphasis in my recruitment message on wanting to hear from all kinds of members, I was pleased to be able to interview both members who were among the forum’s most active posters *and* members who had never posted a public message. This was important in order to avoid assuming that the political benefits of engaging with OSS are only available to its most active members, but also not to ignore forms of participation which are not publically

visible (such as discussions with other members through private messaging or attending meet ups).

The diversity of the members I interviewed presents greater limitations in terms of socio-cultural background. While Goodreads provides information on how many members a group has and lists the Goodreads profiles of these members, I cannot know how the 22 members I interviewed differ from others. My participants represented a broader age range than I had anticipated and were residents of nine countries, however all were located in North America or Europe. As can be seen in the questionnaire below I allowed members to volunteer as much or as little information about themselves as they wanted, only prompting that it would be useful to know their age, gender, location and occupation. In the context of discussion in Chapter 6 of accusations that Emma Watson is a ‘white feminist’, it is perhaps a particular limitation that I did not ask participants to tell me their ethnicity and the majority did not volunteer this information.

C.1.3 Full Questionnaire

The full questionnaire sent to each participant is shown below. I informed participants they could answer as many or as few of these questions as they wanted, provide any additional information they thought was interesting, and provide answers in any order or format. Information on how I analysed responses can be found in section 6.2. As I had asked in my recruitment message for volunteers to ‘tell me your OSS story’, some included relevant information on why they joined the group and what it meant to them in their initial emails or messages expressing interest in participating. I included this information in my analysis, only excluding information given by members who did not respond to the questionnaires I then sent them who therefore also did not complete a consent form. I deleted all correspondence from the two members who contacted me but did not complete an interview.

1. Why did you want to join Our Shared Shelf?
2. Were you already following Emma Watson's feminist activism before (through HeForShe and/or through her social media)?
3. If so, what was it about Emma Watson and/or her activism that made you want to get involved?
4. What do you do on OSS, and what do you most enjoy about being part of it?

(For example, do you read the books? Do you post messages and start threads and, if so, what do you like to discuss? Do you mostly read other people's messages?)
5. Do you think that your thoughts on feminism have changed since getting involved in OSS? Have you learned about new issues that you were not aware of before?
6. Do you now find yourself discussing feminism and related issues more often with other people, or taking any other kind of action over inequality?
7. Since joining OSS, do you feel more able to push for change on issues that matter to you? Do you feel more able to make your voice heard?
8. What other difference has being involved in OSS made in your everyday life? Is there anything else you think I need to know?
9. And finally, please tell me a little bit about yourself. It would be good to know your age, gender, where you live and what you do (I'm interested in how people's experiences might vary according to things like this) but you don't have to tell me and you can be as vague as you want ☺.

C.1.3 Ethics and Consent

All participants completed an online consent form hosted by Google Forms, sent to them individually by email. I was the only person who could see responses, and I emailed each participant a completed copy of their form for future reference. The form asked participants to click 'Yes' or 'No' in response to the statements shown below, before asking them to enter their name and the date. This consent form stated my name, institutional affiliation and two email addresses, encouraging participants to contact me through email or Goodreads at any time if they had questions or wished to withdraw.

1. I confirm that I have been informed and understand the purpose of this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason as to why.
3. I understand that neither my name nor OSS username will be used in publication.
4. I give permission for the researcher to quote from my responses (anonymously).
5. I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) on secure devices for research purposes.
6. I give my consent to take part in this study.

Consent forms and all of the data collected in this study, including the fieldnotes I made to inform research questions and questions for interview, are stored on a password protected cloud service. All names used to refer to participants in Chapters 6 and 7 are pseudonyms. While I have taken steps to keep participants anonymous, it is likely that even with the limited information given about participants the combination of this with quotes from interviews would make some of the most ‘visible’ members easy to guess for others. By using anonymised interviews rather than forum posts as my direct object of analysis, however, I have minimised the potential for participants and forum members who did not take part in this research to be identified. Where I have used forum posts to address my research questions (see discussion of OSS and the Women’s March in section 7.3.3) I have coded these and loosely described key themes rather than quoting posts. This is essential not only as non-participant forum members did not consent to being part of this study, but also because with forum accessible without creating an account quotes could easily be used to identify members through search engines (Kozinets, 2015: 141).

While it would not be possible to ensure every member or even every active member was aware of the research, I followed Kozinets’ recommendations for ensuring ‘good research ethics’ in this context (2015: 151-152). In addition to asking moderators for

permission and posting my recruitment message on the public forum where all members could potentially see it, I amended my personal Goodreads profile to make it clear that I am a researcher. For the duration of the study my profile provided a link to the recruitment message, an overview of my research interests, and information on how members could contact me if they wanted to ask questions or discuss the research.

C.2 Media Coverage of Emma Watson

I used Google Alerts to collect coverage of Emma Watson from online news and entertainment sources from July 2015 (she established Our Shared Shelf in January 2016). In my analysis of how Watson performs claims to represent feminists in section 6.3 I refer directly to media coverage – online and in print newspapers and magazines – of several events and statements. I refer to the political information cycle sparked by Watson’s collaboration with Books On The Underground, but do not refer directly to any of these articles in text. All online news coverage collected of this event is listed below. This was used to inform my analysis of how Watson used social media to spark political information cycles and how her representative claims were discussed. I do not list here the print media coverage of Watson or coverage of other events mentioned as these are referenced in text and in the bibliography. I also do not list any of the social media or OSS content published by Watson which I collected, as I discuss and reference this in Chapters 6 and 7.

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